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The "Little Way" of Spiritual Childhood



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BLESSED

THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS

« I shall teach to souls
my *little way* ».

The "Little Way" of Spiritual Childhood

According to the Life and Writings of

Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus

By the Rev. G. MARTIN, Superior of the Diocesan Missionaries of la Vendée. Translated at the Carmel of Kilmacud, Co. Dublin

"Here, then, is a way which, without giving to everyone assurance of reaching the heights to which God has led Thérèse, is not only possible, but easy for all. As St Augustine remarks, not everyone can preach and perform great works, but who is there that cannot pray, humble himself, and love?"—PIUS XI.

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

HAD Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus remained on earth she would have been fifty years of age this year, 1923, which sees decreed to her the honours of Beatification.

Other young saints, it is true, have in as short a time had the happiness of sanctifying themselves and the glory of being beatified. But what is new, we believe, in the history of canonizations is the unprecedented movement to which her cause has given rise throughout the whole world. From every quarter of the universe, in fact, from uncivilized as well as civilized countries, from all classes of society, have come innumerable and most touching supplications begging the Holy See to raise to the honours of the Altar the humble little Carmelite, who, on the last evening of September, 1897, passed gently away at the Monastery of Lisieux, without, however, having done anything remarkable in the ordinary sense of the word, and, at all events, practically unknown to her contemporaries at the time of her death.

Such a movement, astonishing though it be, may, apparently, be explained by the extraordinary abundance of favours attributed to her intercession. But these favours in their turn demand explanation. For God does nothing without motive, and, above all,

He is not lavish of His miracles without weighty reasons.

In the designs of God the miracle is the letter of recommendation that He gives to His envoys in order to accredit them with men; it is the impress of the Divine Seal upon their acts and the authentic proof of their supernatural mission.

Had then Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus a providential mission to fulfil? Yes, and the *shower of roses* that she had announced before her death, and has never during twenty-five years ceased to let fall upon the world, is but the Divine signature certifying her commission.

The meaning and purpose of this mission Sœur Thérèse explained clearly a short time before her death: *I feel*, she said, *that my mission is soon to begin*, *my mission to make others love the good God as I love Him . . . to give to souls my little way. I will spend my heaven in doing good on earth. This is not impossible, since the Angels from the very heart of the Beatific Vision keep watch over us. No, I shall not be able to take any rest until the end of the world. But when the Angel shall have said: Time is no more! then I shall rest*, *shall be able to rejoice*, *because the number of the elect will be complete.*

And being asked what way she wished to teach to souls, she replied: *It is the path of spiritual childhood; it is the way of trust and of entire self-surrender. I want to make known to them the means that have*

so perfectly succeeded for me, to tell them there is one only thing to do here below: to cast before Jesus the flowers of little sacrifices, to win Him by caresses! That is how I have won Him, and that is why I shall be so well received.[1]

It is this "little way" of spiritual childhood that the present work proposes to make known. It is addressed to all seriously Christian souls, but particularly to those whom Blessed Thérèse always called "little souls," designating by this word those who, not being called to imitate the splendid achievements of the great Saints, must for that very reason walk in the simplicity of the common way during their whole life.

For the inestimable advantage of this little way is to put perfection within reach of all who are of good will; to render accessible to whomsoever has the sincere desire of attaining thereto, the highest summits of Divine Love.

Two principal motives have inspired the author to write. In the first place, the wish to make known to a great number of souls desirous of perfection, but who often grow discouraged because they find the way too obscure and too difficult, "a new little way, very easy and very short, by which to go to Heaven."[2]

In the second place, a profound feeling of gratitude towards the lovable saint who during her exile here

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

[2] *Ibid.*, chap. ix.

below prayed so much and suffered so much for the sanctification of priests and in whom he loves to recognize his Heavenly Benefactress. To him this work is the ex-voto of his gratitude.

One fear, however, there was of a nature to hold him back: the fear of misinterpreting the true mind of Blessed Thérèse by badly expressing her thoughts. But in the midst of the twofold family, human and religious, where this celestial flower of virtue sprang up and bloomed, those very persons who were the best able, from her early childhood to her last hour, to penetrate to her inmost soul have been well pleased to give to the author of these pages the assurance, most precious to him, that the true sentiments of their holy little sister have been faithfully expressed. It is only at their request that he decided to give this study to the public.

His aim in composing it has not been to write a complete treatise on spirituality, but only to point out a particularly easy means of sanctification. And so there is question merely of what directly relates to the little way of childhood.

But to one who wishes to impress his mind very deeply with the spirit of Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, it will be most useful to go back to the fountain-head and read with care the "Histoire d'une Ame."

Finally, to complete our modest study, we strongly recommend the work that the Carmel of Lisieux has

just published under the title: "*L'Esprit de la Bienheureuse Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, d'après ses écrits et les témoins oculaires de sa Vie*" ("The Spirit of Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, according to her writings and the eyewitnesses of her life"), and in which pious hands have arranged with as much art as love, and as so many precious stones in a rich casket, all that could be gathered of the thoughts and sentiments of the dear Beata. From reading and meditating on it, the greatest profit will be derived.

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CHAPTER I

How the Way of Spiritual Childhood is Founded on the Gospel and in what it Consists

It is one of the most consoling truths of our holy religion that Baptism, in regenerating us, has communicated to us the divine life and has made us the children of God.

"Behold," says St John, "what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God."[1]

This idea of divine sonship is the basis of our relations with God in the law of grace. The Gospel is saturated with it from the beginning to the end. Our Lord returns to it continually. When He speaks of God, whether it be to His Apostles in private or before the multitude, He gives Him no other name than that of Father. Thus, in St Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount alone, the expression occurs sixteen times.

Holy Church has not failed to notice this touching fact, and at the *Pater* of the Mass she takes care to point out that if she dares to use this name of Father

[1] I John iii I.

in speaking of God, it is because "God Himself has given her this saving precept and taught her to do it." This it is, she declares, which inspires her with the courage to say, "Our Father who art in Heaven," etc.

It is then not justifiable to doubt it. God offers Himself to us as the Father of the great Christian family, and He wills that every one of us, not only in prayer, but in every circumstance, shall look upon himself as His child and behave as such.

I.—What Manner of Father God is for us

But in practice, what idea must we form of this Father in Heaven? Must we, whilst ascribing to Him this beautiful name, refuse to attribute to Him that which here below gives so many charms to a father in the eyes of the child? I mean to say: that considerate tenderness, eager and vigilant, that delicate care of all that concerns the welfare of the child, and that paternal goodness, which, overflowing from a very loving heart, manifests itself in all circumstances in look, word and gesture. And must we, by reason of the respect that we owe Him, represent to ourselves our Father in Heaven as a far-off being, so far away that He is almost inaccessible, impassive in the midst of His glory and so much above us by His majesty that it is just enough if, through pity, He permit that we give Him the name of "Father," to which name so much grandeur and such great distance would render Him, as it were, unresponsive?

Our Father in Heaven far away from us! But

how could that be, since it is in Him that we have life and movement and being?[1]

Reason suffices to tell us this. But faith goes further, and teaches us that by the grace of Baptism the Holy Trinity as such dwells in our souls as in His Tabernacle—that God is in us as a loving father in the house of His child. Jesus has said: "If anyone love Me My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make our abode with him."[2]

Being so near to us and always so present to our inmost self, and being at the same time infinite Love and infinite Goodness, how could our Heavenly Father occupy Himself about us only indifferently and negligently? The truth is that His paternal Providence extends to the smallest details of our life, has numbered the hairs of our head, and without His consent not one shall fall.

There is more. All that to the eyes of a child constitutes the charm of a father, before finding itself in the heart of man, has its source in the heart of God, and it is only because God has put in them a spark, as it were, of His own love, a reflection of His ineffable goodness, that fathers here below are so good to their children. I say a spark, a reflection. But what is a spark near a furnace—what is a pale reflection in comparison with the sun—and what is the heart of the best of creatures compared with the Heart of the good God?

Should someone object that, being God, our Heavenly Father has not the same way that men have of manifesting His tenderness, I reply that God

[1] Acts xvii 28.　　[2] John xiv 23.

became man also in order to be able to love us with the heart of man; that neither death nor the Resurrection has taken away anything of His human goodness. He is to-day in Heaven and in the Host that which He was in the days of His mortal life, always most sweet, always most lovable and exceeding good, always compassionate and infinitely desirous of the happiness of His children on earth.

In the Man-God, neither did the Divinity lessen the charms of the Sacred Humanity, nor did this latter weaken the attributes of the Divinity. This is why the idea we ought to form of our Father in Heaven is not only as that of the most loving and tender of earthly fathers, but as that of a father incomparably better still, infinitely wise and infinitely powerful, always ready, in the exercise of His Providence, to put His Omnipotence and His Wisdom at the service of His Love for our benefit.

II.—What Manner of Children we ought to be to God

See then what our Father in Heaven is in relation to us. But we, His children, how ought we to behave towards Him?

For in one and the same family the children are not all alike. There are big ones and little ones; there are those who, according to their necessities or their temperament, live far from or near to their father, who have recourse to him frequently or rarely, with a simplicity and a confidence more or less great.

Well, the good God wills that we behave in regard

to Him not like the grown ones but like the very little children: *Sicut parvuli.*

The expression is our Lord's own, and He uses it in the Gospel with a touching insistence:

"Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."[1]

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God."[2]

"He that is the lesser amongst you all, he is the greater."[3]

He has moreover on all occasions confirmed His word by His behaviour, and no one, however little he may have read the Gospels, is unaware how Jesus loved to be surrounded by little children, and to draw them to His Heart and bless them. Thus in every way, by word and deed, has He shown His predilection for little children, not only for those who are so by nature, but also for those who have become so, again, by grace. For He has likened them the one to the other, mingling them in one and the same love. He so greatly loved the little children of Judæa, because to His eyes they symbolized spiritual childhood; and in turn, spiritual childhood is so pleasing and so dear to Him because it appears to Him wholly adorned with the charms of natural childhood: "Suffer the little children to come to Me, and forbid them not, for the Kingdom of Heaven is for those who are like unto them."

Now, "when a master sets forth a lesson under

[1] Matt. xviii 3. [2] Mark x 14. [3] Luke ix 48.

various forms, does he not wish by this multiplicity of forms to signify that he holds it to be a lesson of very special importance? If he seeks in so many ways to impress it on his disciples, it is because he desires by one mode of expression or another to ensure their more fully understanding it. From this we must conclude that the Divine Master expressly desired that His disciples should see in spiritual childhood a necessary condition in order to obtain eternal life."[1]

There is then no doubt of it. To make oneself as a very little child in the spiritual life is to respond to the clearly intimated will, as well as to the dearest desires of the Heart of our Lord.

III.—What it is to Enter into the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood

Such is precisely the aim of the "little way" of Blessed Thérèse. To enter into it is nothing else than to adopt interiorly the manner of thinking and acting of the little ones and to behave in all things with regard to our Father in Heaven as they behave with regard to their earthly father. It is to transfer into the supernatural domain of the soul the characteristics of childhood and to live under the eyes of God as little children here below live under our eyes.

This simple definition enables us already by comparison to form a sufficiently exact idea of the "little way."

[1] H.H. Benedict XV, on the occasion of the proclamation of the heroicity of the virtues of Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus.

The characteristics of the child are, in the first place, his littleness and his weakness, his poverty and his simplicity. Of himself, what, in fact, is he? What can he do? What does he possess? Nothing or almost nothing. Therefore, he has no other resource than the help that comes to him from his beloved parents. Left to himself, everything is wanting to him. With them, he is assured of wanting for nothing. From thence in his little heart there comes a sense of absolute confidence which impels him unconsciously to rely upon them with simplicity for all that concerns him. He lives then without preoccupation and without fear, wholly surrendered to their care. This is abandonment.[1]

To the confidence of this cherished little being, the parents respond with unceasing solicitude and continual vigilance to keep from him all that might be hurtful, and to procure for him all that may be useful or pleasant. But he is not ungrateful. He wishes, therefore, to repay them in his own way. And his way is very simple, yet at the same time so excellent that it suffices to compensate his parents amply for all their goodness to him. He is incapable of, he has no knowledge of anything save to love. But he loves in all sincerity, simply, ingenuously, with his whole heart And one may say that all his occupation is to love.

To become the same—little, weak and poor before the good God, to go to Him with our whole soul in unbounded confidence, and to surrender ourselves to Him in entire abandonment, then finally and above

[1] The "Little Way."

all to love Him, to lavish on Him all the love of which we are capable, not voluntarily to let pass any opportunity of showing Him that we love Him: it is thus that the children of the good God ought to live here below. And it is to live thus that Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus invites all little souls who desire to walk after her in her "little way."

All then that they have to do is to assume the characteristics of childhood and live as children live.

The characteristics of childhood, as we have just said, are littleness and weakness together with poverty and simplicity.

As regards the life of the soul of a very little child, it is wholly concentrated in confidence, love and abandonment.

It is the study of these different virtues which enables us to enter into the secret of the little way.

CHAPTER II

Littleness and Weakness

THE first mark of a child is its being small. According as it grows, the child ceases to be a child.

The first thing to do in order to enter into the way of spiritual childhood is therefore to become very, very little before the good God.

Now to be little is to be humble; to be very, very little is to be perfectly humble. It is to see ourselves such as we are of ourselves, such as we are without the Divine Mercy—that is to say, a mere nothing and no more. And not only to see, but *to like to see ourselves* such as we have just said and to rejoice at this sight.

For one may thoroughly know his wretchedness and yet be exceeding proud—witness Satan. True humility is not in the sight, but in the *loved* sight of our lowliness. This is humility of heart, the only true humility. It ought to be that of the little one.

I.—In the Way of Childhood how much we ought to Prize and Desire Humility of Heart

If then, Christian soul, you wish to become in God's sight a little child most dear to His Heart, begin by making yourself as small as you can in your own eyes. Seek to know yourself as you truly are. In you there is good and bad. All the good is from God; be faithful in thanking Him for it. All

the bad is from you: profit by it so as to know and despise yourself. Because this inability to do good, these evil inclinations, this self-love, these failures, these faults have their hold in the depths of your being and result from your imperfection. Look all that full in the face. Be not afraid to open your eyes wide upon this great mass of miseries, and above all let it not sadden you, but rejoice in proportion as you discover in yourself new sources of powerlessness and new abysses of weakness.

That is how Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus acted: *I do not grieve*, she said, *in seeing that I am weakness itself. On the contrary, it is in that I glory, and I expect each day to discover in myself new imperfections. I acknowledge that these lights concerning my nothingness do me more good than lights concerning faith.*[1]

And feeling clearly that this attraction as well as this light came to her from the good God, she thanked Him as for one of the most precious graces that He could grant to a soul. She even added: *The Almighty has done great things in me, and the greatest is to have shown me my littleness and my powerlessness for all good.*

Therefore, all that best served to teach her her nothingness was dear and precious to her. And as nothing teaches us more efficaciously than the experience of our weakness duly acknowledged, it came to pass that her imperfections, far from disheartening her, rather caused her joy, especially from the day when she came to understand that there are

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. ix.

faults (of frailty) *which do not pain the good God. What does it matter to me*, she would say, *to fall each moment? By that I feel my weakness, and therein I find great profit. My God, You see what I can do if You do not carry me in Your arms!*

Here assuredly is one of the most incontestable marks of humility. The truly humble soul is never surprised at her falls. What astonishes her is not the falling, but the not falling more frequently and more heavily.

Does it astonish anyone to see a wee child fallen on the ground? It cannot even support itself standing upright, how then could it *not* make false steps? But ordinarily when little children fall they do not much hurt themselves because they never fall from any great height. So also little souls. Their wounds are never very serious. One may say they are healed as soon as wounded. Moreover, far from being weakened by it, it even happens that they rise up stronger than before, because one experience the more has rendered them the more humble. Borrowing the language of St Paul, Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus loved to say: *It is my weakness that makes all my strength.*[1]

Thus speak all souls who have understood and appreciated humility of heart.

[1] IIIe lettre à la R.M. Agnès de Jésus.

II.—How Humility of Heart, which is the Secret of Strength for the Very Little One, Introduces him into the Little Way and Draws upon him the Favours of Jesus

But there are very few souls who accept without reserve this childlike littleness and who sincerely rejoice when they are permitted to experience their weakness and their helplessness.

The majority willingly enough recognize themselves as weak, but up to a certain point. And often, too often, they wish also to preserve consciousness of their own strength. When all goes in accordance with their desires and they feel generous and well-disposed, willingly they believe, like the Psalmist in the midst of abundance, that nothing will cast them down. But if, an hour later, distaste, weariness or some particular difficulty arise, they imagine that all is lost. And indeed one sees them totter and fall—first into imperfections and then discouragement.

These souls have not understood true humility. They have not understood that what constitutes the strength of the *wee child* is its very weakness; that the weaker and the more helpless it is of itself the more eagerly do we hasten to its aid. To a child more grown we do not dream of giving the same care nor lavishing the same attention as on one just born.

In like manner does the good God incline with more love to the soul that He sees to be the least and weakest. Hear what He says in the Book of

Proverbs: "Whosoever is a little one, let him come unto Me." But what is He going to do to this little one? Why does He invite him to draw near? Our Beata has already sought to learn, and it is by interrogating the throbbings of love of the adorable Heart of Him who is Father before all fathers and above all fathers, that she has found the response and discovered the secret of her little way: "As a mother caresses her child, so will I comfort thee," saith the Lord. "I will carry thee upon My bosom and I will cradle thee upon My knees."[1]

Having cited this text she adds: *Ah, never came words more sweet, more tender, to gladden my soul.* She came, in fact, to find in them the object of her most ardent desires. She was seeking *a very direct little way* of going to God; better than that, *feeling that she was too little to climb the rugged steps of perfection, she wanted to find a lift to raise her up even unto Jesus.* And now the words of Eternal Wisdom have suddenly discovered it to her: *Thine Arms, O Jesus, are the lift which must raise me up even unto Heaven. For that I need not grow greater, on the contrary it is necessary that I remain little, that I tend to littleness ever more and more.*[2]

These last words should be carefully noted and very great attention be given to them. For they contain one of the most important secrets of the life of spiritual childhood: *I need not grow, on the contrary it is necessary that I remain little, that I tend to littleness ever more and more.* And here we must

[1] *Cf.* Isa. lxvi 13.
[2] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. ix.

notice an essential difference between the natural life and the spiritual life. In the first, one cannot always remain little. There is a necessary growth which sooner or later obliges all to leave childhood behind. In the second, on the contrary, the older we grow and the further we advance the more necessary is it that we become little. Here the steps forward are marked principally by the progress in humility—that is to say, the perception clearer and clearer, and ever more dear, of our nothingness; so that the more the soul loves to see herself weak and miserable *the more fit is she for the operations of consuming and transforming Love.*

The more does Jesus love her: *What pleases Jesus in my little soul is to see me love my littleness and my poverty, it is seeing the blind trust that I have in His mercy.*[1]

The more does Jesus enlighten her: *Because I was little and weak, Jesus stooped down to me and tenderly instructed me in the secrets of His love.*[2]

The more confidence ought she to have in the all-powerful action of Jesus in her: *It was Jesus who did all in me, and I—I did nothing but be little and weak.*

We shall see by what follows that this interior work of Jesus in the soul does not dispense her from personal effort. On the contrary, having become a little child in regard to the good God, she must seek every opportunity of pleasing her Father in Heaven by her generosity. But we speak here of the fundamental disposition of the life of childhood which

[1] VI[e] lettre à Sr. Marie du S. Cœur.
[2] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. v.

consists, before all, in a state of littleness and weakness recognized, sought after, loved. And that is why we insist so much on this point.

Let us also observe that this state is always possible at any age and in all positions in life. For, as Blessed Thérèse asserted, *it is quite possible to remain little even in filling the most important offices, and even on attaining extreme old age. As for me*, she said, *if I lived eighty years, having filled all the offices, I should, I feel certain, be quite as little at the time of my death as I am to-day.*

This remark was not without profit. It proves that the little way is suited to all the stages of life as well as to all conditions. It is never too late to enter it. It is never time to leave it.

CHAPTER III

Poverty

THE second characteristic mark of the life of childhood is *Poverty*. In the eyes of Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, spiritual poverty was of very great importance; accordingly she assigned to it a place of quite first rank in the heart of the *little ones*.

Nature, moreover, will so have it. Even amongst the rich, the child possesses nothing of his own. Everything belongs to his parents, who themselves give him what is necessary according to his needs. After his example, the soul who enters into the way of spiritual childhood must look upon herself as possessing nothing of her own.

I.—The Spirit of Poverty Shelters the Soul from Want by Accustoming her to look to the Good God for All Things

This, in the opinion of Blessed Thérèse, was the surest means of never wanting for anything. She drew her conclusions from what takes place amongst the poor. *Even in the homes of the poor*, she explained, *they give to the little child what is necessary for him. But when he has grown up his father will maintain him no longer, and says to him: Now work, you can provide for yourself. Well, it was to escape ever hearing that*, she added, *that I have never wished to grow up, feeling myself incapable of earning my living, the eternal life of Heaven. For I*

have never been able to do anything of myself alone. I have then always remained little, having no other occupation than that of gathering the flowers of love and sacrifice and offering them to the good God for His pleasure.[1]

One could not reason better, nor more lovingly, nor more wisely. Just now the child of Providence was saying to her Father in Heaven: "I can do nothing; be Thou my strength!" Now she adds: "I have nothing; be Thou my wealth!" After that, how could a father so good and so rich as is the good God leave her in want, while earthly fathers, so far behind His divine goodness, take so much pleasure in granting the least desires of their little children?

In like manner, the soul who realizes her poverty, who sees herself to be without virtue and without courage, incapable of any good, powerless in the face of the least sacrifice or of the least temptation, and who sincerely recognizes it, has but to turn trustfully to Him whose goodness supplies for all. A cry from her heart, a word, a gesture, a look will suffice, the simplest prayer being always best. And the Father who from the heights of Heaven looks lovingly on all that is little and humble will come to the help of His child.

From this it follows that the child's surest means of lacking nothing is to possess nothing and to expect all from the good God.

[1] "Conseils et Souvenirs."

II.—But we must await Everything from Day to Day and even from Moment to Moment

A father only gives to his child what is necessary or useful for him at the moment. One does not usually present an entire big loaf of bread to a wee child, but only as much of it as is needful to appease his hunger. Again, one does not put him in possession of a whole wardrobe of linen. One gives him what is necessary day by day. And it is thus that the good God acts in regard to His little child.

Unfortunately there are few souls who resign themselves to receiving only little by little and from moment to moment the assistance of their Father in Heaven. They would prefer to be enriched all at once. That is because we so love to see ourselves with provision for the future. This is true of worldly people from the temporal point of view, and it is true of a multitude of souls from the spiritual point of view. "I do wish," they say, "to count upon God, but would that I were able also to count upon myself. Would that I could ascertain my progress, render account to myself of the good that I do; in short, see myself in possession of a real spiritual fortune that I should be able to handle as one handles fine clear-ringing crowns. What security that would give me for the future!"

But no, that is false reckoning. There is no security that can preserve from one single sin, nor give strength to accomplish the very lightest sacrifice but the grace of God alone. And God does not give His grace in advance. Is not this grace called

actual grace, to denote that it is given only at the moment of need? And it is necessary that the gift of it be renewed at every moment.

Many a time have I noticed, wrote Blessed Thérèse, *that Jesus will not give me provision for the future. He sustains me from moment to moment with nourishment that is ever new. I find it in me without knowing how it is there. I believe quite simply that it is Jesus Himself, hidden in the depths of my poor little heart, who acts in me in a mysterious manner, and inspires me with all He wills me to do at the moment.*[1]

Again, she said: *Let us deem ourselves of the number of quite little souls whom the good God must every moment sustain.*

Now, God wills that we should ask this grace of Him just as He gives it day by day, the better to keep us in dependence upon Him and to oblige us to have recourse to Him continually. It is not the bread of the whole year, but the bread of each day that He has taught us to ask for: "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread."

Thus thought and thus prayed the "little Thérèse":

What matters it to me, Lord, if the future sombre be—
To pray Thee for the morrow, ah, no, not there my way.
Keep Thou my heart pure, let Thy shadow cover me
Only for this one day.[2]

In this manner, the soul can practise spiritual poverty though all the while loaded with graces and,

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. viii.
[2] "Mon chant d'aujourd'hui."

as it were, bowed down under the weight of the riches of Heaven. And the avowal that she humbly makes before God of her poverty, in a measure forces her good Father in Heaven to open to her yet more fully His Divine treasures.

III.—It is Necessary that the Gifts of God be Received and Kept without the Spirit of Ownership

Nevertheless, these treasures entrusted to the hands of the child remain always the treasures of the good God, and the good God who is master of them retains, it is evident, the right to take them back. This is true of supernatural gifts of grace and of virtues; it is true also of natural gifts, such as health, intellect, situations, employments, etc. Therefore the truly poor in spirit remains perfectly detached.

Now, wrote the Blessed Thérèse towards the end of her life, *I have received the grace to be no more attached to the goods of mind and heart than to those of the earth.*[1]

In the Old Testament, Job had given an admirable example of this perfect detachment, and his words are well known: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away" (he was speaking of his goods, of his children, of his health), "blessed be the name of the Lord."[2]

Not less, and perhaps even more beautiful still, is

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. x.
[2] Job i 21.

the prayer of the "little Thérèse" to her Mother in Heaven:

All that He hath given me may Jesus take again.
O tell Him never must He feel in aught constrained with me. . . .

Job accepted with resignation what the Divine Will had ordained. Blessed "little Thérèse" anticipates this holy Will; not only will she let herself be despoiled, but she does not wish that *Jesus should feel any hesitation* about doing it; she wishes that He should consult only His Divine good pleasure.

And see here how already in the practice of poverty all the delicacy of her childlike heart manifests itself.

Little souls, you who also aspire to the perfection of spiritual childhood; following the example of your lovable model, let your Father in Heaven by turns enrich you or seem to despoil you. Cling to nothing as much as to Him. May His holy Will be dearer to you than all His gifts. Thus will you be truly poor in spirit, poor in appearance, but in reality rich. Thus you will imitate the tiny child who regards his mother with the same love whether she puts on or takes off his holiday frock. For that which he loves is not what is given him or taken from him, but the hand that gives, or takes away. He feels that he is loved. He feels that all is for his good. And that suffices.

IV.—We must remain Poor for Life

Blessed "little Thérèse" has already told us, in speaking of humility, that *one can quite well remain little even on attaining extreme old age.*

On the subject of poverty she has written the same thing: *As for me, if I live to be eighty, I shall be always just as poor. I know not how to save up: all I have I spend immediately to purchase souls.*[1]

But acting thus, one may question what will remain to the soul at the close of life wherewith to purchase Heaven.

To this objection our Beata replies with her naïve and childlike confidence: *I shall have no works of mine. Well, the good God will reward me according to His own works.*

Howsoever strange it may appear to one who has not entered into this way of loving confidence in God, this is why she desired to appear before the good God *with hands empty*, having instead of all riches nothing but the humble acceptance of her destitution.

These words, in truth, call for some explanation.

When Blessed Thérèse tells us that she will have no personal works to present to the good God at her last hour, and that she wishes to appear before Him with empty hands, she does not intend to teach the uselessness of good works. To interpret her thus would be completely to distort her thought. Her piety, as we shall see in the course of this study, was most active. She would not have been willing to lose even a very trifling opportunity of practising virtue. But what she did was not done in order to store up merit in view of eternity; it was solely for the good pleasure of Jesus, to whom she gave up all her good works as soon as performed in order to purchase souls for Him.

[1] "Conseils et Souvenirs."

She called that: "to play" at the bank of Love. This, then, was not indolence or carelessness on her part, but great wisdom. For when one knows the Heart of the good God one cannot doubt about the excellence of the investment. Did not St Teresa of Avila say that if one gives Him a maravedi He immediately returns a hundred ducats?

It was not, however, this hope of profit that guided our Beata. She had too much of disinterestedness to be inspired by that. But in her filial confidence she believed that at her last hour Jesus, seeing her come to Him with empty hands, after having expended everything for souls, would be Himself her holiness, and clothing her with His own merits would render her holy for eternity. She hoped thus to receive the eternal possession of God, not as the recompense of her own works, but from the sole love of Jesus. And as regards throne and crown, she wanted none but the good God alone.

That being so, she had no need to be preoccupied about amassing riches. Her treasure was already in the hands of her Father in Heaven. To obtain it one day, it would suffice for her to imitate little children who, assured of the paternal inheritance, are content with loving their fond father and fully rely upon him for the care of their future.

So poverty and humility go together and walk side by side the whole length of the little way. The perfection that one practises therein does not consist in growing greater but in tending ever more and more to littleness, nor in enriching oneself but in remaining always poor. And we must accept the being

poor and weak; but better still, we must love to be so until death.

V.—Consequences of the Preceding in Relation to the Forgetting of Creatures and of Self

A poor child does not hold an important place in the world. Outside his parents, very few trouble themselves about him or notice him.

A *little soul* walking along in the *little way* must also accept with joy the neglect of fellow-creatures. *May all creatures be nothing to me, and I nothing to them*, had the Beata exclaimed on the day of her religious Profession. . . . *May none concern themselves about me; may I be forgotten, trodden under foot as a little grain of sand.*[1]

She, then, placed her happiness and her glory in being forgotten.

She went further, she made herself so little in her own eyes that she came to lose sight of herself. *I wish to be forgotten*, she had said, *not by fellow-creatures only, but also by self, so as no longer to have any desire except to love the good God.*

Thus did she bring herself to nothing. In this she was the faithful imitator of Him who came upon earth to be annihilated. And therein consists the perfection of humility for the very little ones: to become less than nothing, so little that we come to lose sight of self, to forget self always in order to have but one thought in the mind, one desire in the heart—the love of the good God.

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. viii.

No one can walk at his ease if he be encumbered with baggage, but he who has got rid of everything runs easily. This is why humility and poverty so well fit a soul to walk after Jesus, who left all things, keeping only His Cross in order to ascend Calvary. And for this reason Blessed Thérèse could sing:

To the Heart Divine with tend'rest love o'erflowing,
All have I given that I had to give . . .
Swiftly I run, none other riches knowing,
Only on love to live.

CHAPTER IV

Confidence in God

SMALL and weak, destitute of all things, the child, as we have seen, can do nothing of himself. But if the tender love of a father is there to supply for it, this very helplessness is going to become for him a source of strength. In what manner one can guess.

The wee child would like to walk but finds it impossible; his feet, being too frail, refuse to support him. Or again some danger threatens him and he seeks to defend himself. But what can his feeble arm do? Happily his father is there. A quick look towards this father and the father has understood, has stooped down and lifted up his child. He clasps him in his arms and holds him to his heart. With what joy he carries him and with what love he protects him! And behold the little one become for the time being strong with all the strength of his father.

Happy privilege of childhood which owes to its helplessness the being so quickly and so effectually rescued. Irresistible the power of a simple look from a child which no father's heart here below can withstand. How could the good God withstand it, He who has created all hearts of fathers on the model of His own?

It is this look of loving confidence that He, too, awaits from His little child in order to come to his aid. True, God is so good that often, without being called, He hastens to help us. However, He comes

with still more eagerness to him who calls Him the more frequently, usually proportioning His tenderness to the confidence that He discerns in the supplicant look. Because for the soul, to look towards God, to have confidence or to ask, is but one and the same thing. And has not Jesus said: "If you ask the Father anything in my name He will give it you"? It is in the same sense that Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus also said: *We obtain from the good God quite as much as we hope for.*

It is of supreme import to the soul who walks in the little way of childhood to encourage in herself an immense confidence in God. This for her, from the point of view of her perfection, is an essential question. For, as we have said, in becoming a little child she obliges herself to expect everything from the good God.

Therefore it is necessary that, from the outset, she establish herself solidly in confidence, and that by a very frequent exercise of this virtue she set herself to augment it from day to day. It is also necessary that she beg for this grace. Because a great confidence like that of Blessed Thérèse is a signal gift from God and the effect of His Divine liberality. However, if we cannot acquire it by personal industry, we can at least dispose ourselves for it by a great fidelity to grace and by the ardour of our desires.

Above all, it is necessary to give to our confidence solid foundations. Let us begin by establishing them.

I.—Foundations of Confidence

It is not in ourselves that we must seek them, but in God alone, in His Love, in His Mercy, and even in His Divine Justice.

Indeed, the first result of the humility of which we have previously spoken must surely be to rid us of all confidence in self. Once entered into this way of genuine littleness and spiritual poverty the soul no longer sees in herself anything of her own, except her nothingness, her misery, and her frailty. How then, on so clear and penetrating a view of the nothing that she is, could she place the least confidence in self? And there we see the signal grace and inestimable advantage that the life of childhood confers. It forces the soul to go out of herself, to look outside self in order to seek the assistance she is in need of. But to whom shall she go if not to her Heavenly Father? To whom shall she look if not to the infinitely good and merciful God, to Him who is all love?

First Foundation of Confidence:

LOVE OF THE GOOD GOD FOR US.

For such is the beautiful definition that St John has given us of God, having himself drawn it from the Heart of Jesus on the evening of the Last Supper: "God is Charity." Now, all God is, that He is infinitely. Therefore He is infinite Charity. Then God loves me, and with a love so great that it goes beyond all that one can say of it. He loves me, and there is in His love all that is the most capable of

increasing my confidence: a tenderness, a goodness, a generosity, a desire to do me good, which are immense.

God loves me. And how should I not love Him since I am the work of His hands? I am more, and better still, for I am His child. He has communicated to me His life in communicating to me His nature. He is my Father, my good Father, ever inclining towards me to watch and to provide for all my needs. But why do I say inclining towards me when He resides in me, in the innermost recesses of my being? There, more continually and with more solicitude than I could do it, He thinks of me and occupies himself about me. His love which is unceasing is my sweet Providence. And at the service of this ever watchful Providence there is Omnipotence, always ready to intervene in order to second the designs of Love.

God loves me; and to prevent my doubting it, He has everywhere written His love for me, in every place and upon everything; in the star that shines to charm me, in the ray of sunshine that warms and gives me light, in the azure of the sky and in the passing cloud, in the fragrance of the flower, and in every morsel of bread that I eat, in my vesture, and on all the stones of my dwelling-place, everywhere. He has written it plainer still with the tears, with the sweat, with the blood, at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, at Golgotha. And He Himself has remained, in person, by the most touching and inconceivable of marvels, in all the Tabernacles of the world, in order to repeat to me unceasingly, day and

night, far and near, everywhere: "I love thee. Only see how I love thee."

It was at sight of all these marvels of love that Blessed Thérèse cried out: *O Jesus, suffer me to tell Thee that Thy love reaches even unto folly. . . . What wilt Thou, in face of this folly, but that my heart dart upwards to Thee . . . how can my confidence have any bounds?*

And since all this love is for us, too, why should we ourselves set bounds to our confidence? Let us then enlarge to the full our hearts. Let us not allow fear to straiten them. And let us repeat boldly with Blessed Thérèse: *Never can we have too much confidence in the good God—so good!*

Second Foundation of Confidence:

INFINITE MERCY.

Yes, it is true, someone will say, the goodness of God is immense, and one can understand saints having boundless confidence in Him because they are saints. But I who am so destitute of virtues and merits, so full of imperfections, I shall never be able to share their confidence; I am too miserable.

Too miserable! But do you then forget that the love of the good God for us is, above all, a *merciful* love, and that *mercy* is nothing else than that touching and mysterious attraction which, filling a heart with pity at the sight of misery, impels it to help, as it inclines towards all that is weakness to raise up again or to relieve, to heal a wound, to forgive an injury? A compassionate heart goes out instinctively to misery—and with the more eagerness and

love the greater the misery. For just as the heart of the ambitious never beats higher than when it sees new honours to be won, so, too, with the compassionate heart when it sees before it the deepest distress to relieve.

Well, such is the heart of the good God, and such does it appear to us in the Gospels. One ought to take this beautiful book and read it over slowly page by page. Oh what touching things we learn there of the merciful love of the Heart of Jesus! We see there how tenderly He was disposed towards every form of misery, towards poverty and sickness, weakness and suffering, towards death itself, and even towards sin—sin above all, which is the worst of all misfortunes. We see that the more lamentable the misery the more touching always was the mercy.

Blessed Thérèse understood this well; she who night and day carried the Gospels upon her heart, and never ceased to ponder them. A special grace had besides attracted her to them from her childhood. For very, very early she had a special knowledge of the Divine Mercy, and one may say that this was the great light of her life and the grace proper to her mission. No one, it would seem, was ever more attracted than she was to this infinite Mercy; no one penetrated further into its ineffable secrets; no one better understood the immensity of the helps that human weakness can draw from it.

The Mercy of God was the illumining Sun of her soul, that which to her eyes threw light upon all the mystery of God in His relations with man. It was *by its light and in this ineffable mirror that she con-*

templated the other Divine attributes, and seen by this light all appeared to her radiant with love. From thence came the inspiring thought of her spirituality. From thence came forth all " her little doctrine." We know in what that consists:

Confronting the Divine Giant of Love and Mercy, she exposes the immense weakness and utter helplessness of a very little child, and in a transport of irresistible confidence, she throws him into the arms of Mercy in order through Mercy to surrender him wholly to all the Love, to all the Goodness, to all the Wisdom, to all the Power of God.

We can judge from that of the rôle of Divine Mercy in the "little way," and of the idea which it is fitting we should form of it and of the confidence we must place in it.

The life of a " little soul " in Heaven and on earth should be understood as an unceasing hymn of love to the praise of Mercy. She more than any other is made to sing eternally the mercies of the Lord.

Third Foundation of Confidence:

THE DIVINE JUSTICE.

But, someone will again object, in God there are other attributes besides Mercy, and some of them very formidable. There is Justice.

The objection would certainly be grave if justice tended solely to severity. But it falls of itself when we consider that the property of justice is to render to each one that which is his due, and consequently to reward the good as well as to punish the evil.

Moreover, justice to be equitable must take into

account good intentions and also circumstances which lessen the responsibility no less than those which increase it. Now there is in man so much of natural weakness, and original sin has added thereto so much of corruption, that before chastising him for his misdeeds, God, through a sentiment of justice, begins always by considering his profound misery. But He cannot look upon that without being moved to pity, and so it comes about that His Justice itself excites His Mercy. This it is which explains the very different manner in which He dealt with sin in the Angels and in man, and how the same justice which in presence of the sin of the Angels immediately delved out the abysses of hell, in face of the sin of Adam began by opening abysses of love, in the Redemption. And so *it is because He is just that the good God is compassionate and full of gentleness, slow to punish and abounding in mercy. For He knoweth our frailty; He remembereth that we are but dust.*[1]

Besides, since in redeeming us Jesus Christ has made grace to superabound where sin hath abounded, we have through Him an incontestable right to the Divine pity. Since He has paid, and far more than paid all our debts, it is no longer through mercy alone, but through justice that the good God grants us pardon.

Such were the habitual thoughts of our Beata. Therefore, the justice of God no less than His other attributes appeared to her *all radiant with love.* She hoped no less from it than from His Mercy, and

[1] VIe lettre à des Missionaires.

so it is, that *this justice which frightens so many souls was for her a subject of joy and confidence.* In God she saw above all a father. And from the supremely equitable justice of a father infinitely good, what may a child well expect who no doubt sometimes forgets himself, but who nevertheless tries to love as much as he can and who feels that he is tenderly and deeply loved? Severity or tenderness? There is no room for doubt. If this father were ever so little unjust—ah, then the child would have reason to fear. From a father perfectly just he may on the contrary hope all things. And when this father is God, the justice being infinite, confidence, too, ought to be without measure.

Such are the true sources of supernatural hope. How, after that, could we restrict our confidence to the measure of merely human confidence? How could we set bounds to it?

II.—Practical Consequences

From the preceding principles spring several practical truths, which, reduced to axioms by our Beata, must become familiar to every soul who undertakes to follow her in the *little way*. Here are a few of them:

We have never too much confidence in the good God—so good.[1]

We obtain from the good God quite as much as we hope for.

What offends Jesus, what wounds Him to the Heart, is want of confidence.[2]

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.
[2] Ire lettre à Marie Guérin.

It is confidence, and confidence alone, that must lead us to Love.[1]

Let us dwell a little on these thoughts. This will not be to retard our progress. Our soul, on the contrary, will there find strong wings to enable her to fly even unto God.

We have never too much confidence in the good God—so good.

The reason is that God is infinite, infinite in riches, in greatness, in power, as in love. He can give, give again, give always and ever liberally, and do so for centuries; and after that there will remain to Him no less to give; for though He should pour down torrents of His gifts and graces, He loses not the smallest particle of His infinite perfections. He remains afterwards what He was before: infinite. It is His glory to be able to give without measure, and it is His joy to give in reality all that His creatures can or will receive of His gifts. The more they ask Him the more He loves to give. But if, in one of these creatures regenerated by Baptism, the good God sees a Christian, His child, if in this Christian He sees a soul who lays claim to nothing on this earth other than to please Him and to love Him, what limits will He put to His generosity?

The Heart of the good Master asks but to be opened to let the flood of His benefits flow out. And what opens it is confidence, above all, the simple and daring confidence of a child.

It is not with God as with us. We very quickly weary of giving. He never does. We soon con-

[1] VIe lettre à Sr. Marie du Sacré-Cœur.

sider importunate whoever pursues us with demands. The more we ask of the good God, the better is He pleased.

There are graces too that we scarcely dare ask for, because to us they appear too great. But that which in relation to us is the greatest is always very small in relation to God. So it greatly honours Him to measure our petitions by His greatness instead of by our nothingness, and in all our prayers to let the inspiring thought be of what He is, rather, by far, than of what we ourselves are.

That is what Blessed Thérèse did. . . . She thought: *The good God never gives desires which cannot be realized.* What he inspires me to ask of Him is then that which He wills to give me. Again, she said to herself that little children have a right to be daring with their beloved parents. *My excuse*, she wrote in speaking of a prayer she had made and which might appear rash, *my excuse is my title of "child." Children do not reflect on the import of their words. Nevertheless, if their fathers or mothers ascend the throne and are possessed of immense treasures, they do not hesitate about gratifying the desires of the little ones whom they cherish more than themselves. To give them pleasure they squander money, they descend even to weakness.*

Animated by these sentiments, she fears not to ask for herself the perfection of pure love; she forms besides *immense desires, vast as the universe*, of which the realization will extend down the ages even to Eternity. And having formed them, she dares to cry out in the simplicity of her confidence

that *the Lord will work wonders for her which will infinitely surpass her immense desires.* Events have justified her confidence. Her mission confirmed by so many prodigies bears testimony to it. And is not this the most convincing proof of the truth of her words: *We have never too much confidence in the good God—so good?*

In truth, a remark here forces itself upon us, and these words call for an explanation. For one can sin by excess of confidence or presumption; and he would sin by presumption who, while wishing to continue to live in sin or in tepidity, should consider himself nevertheless as assured of salvation, or of attaining to perfection, on condition of supplying for his bad will by the excess of his confidence. To act so would be to fall into a very grave practical heresy. And that is certainly not what we wish to say.

On the contrary, we suppose a well-grounded good will and one of those souls—of whom there are many—who, still far from perfection, unite to sincere desires of being all for God many imperfections and failures. It happens to them to fail in their resolutions and to yield to their faults; they fall; but deep down, their will to sanctify themselves perseveres, and they are always in the disposition to work at it seriously. It is to them we say that they may give free scope to their confidence.

We even say that they should not content themselves with feeble desires, but proportion these to their needs, which are extreme, and to the Divine liberality which is infinite.

If we obtain so little from the good God, it is

because we ask too little. Our Lord affectionately reproached His Disciples with that: "Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you."

But we must ask. To ask, we must desire; we must hope, have confidence that we shall obtain. It is our lack of confidence which hinders the Heart of the good God from freely expanding, just as that of the inhabitants of Nazareth in like manner hindered Jesus from pouring out upon them His prodigies of love and His graces as He would have desired.

All the miracles of the Gospels are due to the confidence of the suppliants. Where it abounded, they multiplied; when it declined, they diminished; when it vanished, they too disappeared.

Therefore, when Blessed "little Thérèse" tells us that *we obtain from the good God quite as much as we hope for*, this is no novelty that she teaches. Her words are the very echo of the Gospel, and of twenty centuries of faith.

We obtain from the good God quite as much as we hope for. . . . Was not Jesus also continually repeating: "Have faith, have confidence in God. . . . All is possible to him that believeth . . . he that believeth in Me, the works that I do he also shall do, and greater than these shall he do."

It is not surprising after all this that our Beata should be able to say: *What offends Jesus, what wounds Him to the Heart, is want of confidence.*

III.—Particular Applications

But it is time to resume our journey in order to tend towards the summit of the mountain of Love.

The same confidence which has given us assurance of one day arriving there, must bring us there through every obstacle. *It is confidence, and confidence alone, that must lead to Love.*[1]

Blessed Thérèse here opposes confidence to servile fear, and she does not mean to say that this confidence dispenses in the least with personal effort and generosity in sacrifice; but that it ought to be powerful enough to enable us to surmount all temptations to discouragement, filial enough to give to the soul every holy daring, firm enough never to slacken, whatsoever may happen.

Let us briefly state on what occasions especially it is important for a soul advancing on the "little way" to practise confidence towards her Father in Heaven.

1. *In Relation to Past Sins,* howsoever great and numerous they may have been. Once we have done our best to obtain pardon for them, the remembrance of them should neither disturb the peace of our soul, nor impede its flight towards God. Let us hear Blessed Thérèse in one of the most sublime passages that confidence has made to burst forth from her heart:

It is not, she wrote, *because I have been shielded from mortal sin that I raise my heart to God in trust and love. I feel that even if I had on my conscience*

[1] VI[e] lettre à Sr. Marie du S. Cœur.

all the crimes one could commit, I should lose nothing of my confidence. Broken-hearted with compunction I would go and throw myself into the arms of my Saviour. I know that the Prodigal Son is dear to Him, I have heard His words to Mary Magdalen, to the adultress, to the Samaritan woman. No one could frighten me, for I know what to believe concerning His Mercy and His Love. I know that in one moment all that multitude of sins would disappear—as a drop of water cast into a flaming furnace.[1]

2. ***On the Occasion of Daily Faults.*** — We must imitate the child who, after an act of disobedience, instead of running away from his father, goes, as soon as he has committed the fault, and throws himself into his arms to implore forgiveness. When we act thus towards Jesus, Blessed Thérèse assures us that *He thrills with joy. He says to His Angels what the father of the prodigal son said to his servants: Put a ring on his finger and let us rejoice,* and he instantly forgives.[2] As for the fault *thus thrown with a filial confidence into the furnace of Love, it is immediately consumed for ever.* No further trace of it remains in the soul. There remains only in the Heart of the good God one joy the more, that joy of which Jesus said that it is greater for one sinner who returns than for the ninety-nine just who need not forgiveness.

What Blessed Thérèse taught so well, she herself practised with a delightful simplicity. She loved

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xi.
[2] VII^{e} lettre à des Missionaires.

to confide to Jesus, to relate to Him even in detail what she called her infidelities, hoping, she said, to acquire thus greater sway over His Heart and to draw to herself more fully the Love of Him Who came not to call the just, but sinners.[1]

Who does not see what confidence, simplicity, and filial love such a mode of acting demands? But also what a deep and loving knowledge of the Heart of God it supposes. It is only a child's heart that can understand to such an extent the Divine tenderness. We may indeed well repeat once more the words of our Lord: "I confess to Thee, O Father, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones."[2]

3. *In Failures.*—When, in particular, it seems that, in spite of all our efforts and good will, we arrive at nothing, we remain always so weak, always so poor in virtue.

Then is the moment to redouble our confidence and to look with more love than ever towards Jesus. When this gentle Saviour saw that the Apostles had fished the whole night without taking anything, He had compassion on them and accomplished on their behalf the great prodigy of the miraculous draught of fishes.[3] Perhaps if St Peter had taken a few little fishes, the Divine Master would not have worked a miracle. The observation is from Blessed Thérèse. But the Apostles had taken nothing. Immediately the Heart of Jesus is touched, He is moved in an instant, He fills the nets with fishes.

[1] Notes inédites. [2] Matt. xi 25.
[3] XVII[e] lettre à sa sœur Céline.

Thus does He often do for souls of good will who have laboured long at their sanctification without any apparent success. It happens that at one stroke He enables them to make more progress than they had achieved in several years. He asks nothing of them but to be humble and confident. For, says Blessed Thérèse, *that is just our Lord's way: He gives as God, but He* WILL *have humility of heart.*

4. ***In Darkness and Aridities,*** when the soul feels herself as it were abandoned by the good God. For the way of childhood has its trials and its temptations, and confidence, which at first sight seems so sweet to practise, is at times difficult. Like every other virtue it has its heroism, and on certain occasions its exercise is especially meritorious.

We must then remember that if God hides Himself thus, it is only through the playfulness of His Love. He wants to make Himself longed for and sought after. He wants, too, to increase our merits by obliging us to live on pure Faith.

In such a case, it is necessary to unite patience with confidence, a patience proof against everything with a blind confidence wholly founded on Love. And we succeed always in winning back Jesus when we can say with Blessed Thérèse: *He will weary sooner of making me wait than I shall of waiting.*

Being questioned as to her mode of acting in those hours of dereliction, of darkness and of temptations against Faith, which were almost continual towards the close of her life: *I turn*, she replied, *to the good God, to all the Saints, and I thank them*

just the same. I think they wish to see to what point I shall carry my trust. . . . But not in vain have the words of Job sunk into my heart: "Though he should kill me yet I will trust in Him."[1]

5. ***In Fears Concerning the Future.***—Numerous are the souls that trouble and torment themselves thinking of what shall happen and even of what shall never happen, and often they are all but crushed beneath the weight of sufferings fabricated by their imagination. Sœur Thérèse, more prudent and more wise, took refuge simply in confidence in God, and nothing could disturb the calm of her soul. For unalterable peace is one of the sweetest fruits of confidence. That is why the Psalmist says that "nothing shall move him who trusts in the mercy of the Most High."[2]

Speaking of the possible sufferings of her malady and the last combats of the agony, our Beata avowed that she feared them not: *The good God*, she said, *has always come to my assistance; He has helped me and led me by the hand from my earliest years . . . I count on Him. My sufferings may reach their furthest limits, but I am sure that He will never abandon me.*[3]

6. ***Finally in Relation to Desires for Holiness Inspired by Grace, howsoever Great they may be.***—For she believed most justly that the good God would not inspire them if He were not willing to satisfy them.

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.
[2] Ps. xx 8.
[3] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

And this, whatsoever our past life may have been, provided there be now the necessary good will. Her confidence showed her the infinite goodness of our Lord placing "the sinner and the virginal soul together in His Heart."

In spite of present imperfection too. The fact of seeing herself *so imperfect after so many years in religion did not in any way take from the audacious confidence she had of becoming a great saint.* For she counted not on her own merits, but on the power of *Him who, being virtue and holiness itself, would only have to take her in His arms in order to raise her up even unto Himself, and clothe her with His infinite merits and make her a saint.*[1]

From the foregoing remarks we may now judge as to the place and the rôle that confidence holds in the "little way." And we have no difficulty in believing Blessed Thérèse when she tells us: *My way is all love and confidence, and I cannot understand those souls who are afraid of so loving a Friend.*[2]

She did not wish to enjoy selfishly this wonderful trust in God with which our Lord inspired her. She ardently longed to share it with all souls called to journey by the way of spiritual childhood. To communicate it to them, to animate them with its spirit, appeared to her as her special mission, the one she would have to accomplish from the heights of Heaven, till the end of the world. *For she was convinced that if souls weak and imperfect as hers—*

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. iv.
[2] VI^e lettre à des Missionaires.

we quote her own words—*felt what she herself felt, not one would despair of reaching the summit of the mount of Love.*[1]

And that is why the story of her life ends with this touching appeal: *O Jesus! could I but tell all little souls of Thine ineffable condescension! I feel that if it were possible to find one more weak than mine, Thou wouldst take delight in showering upon her greater favours still, provided that she abandoned herself with entire confidence to Thine Infinite Mercy.*

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xi.

CHAPTER V

Love

1. The Rôle and the Importance of Love in the Little Way—Its Exercise

WE here touch the vital point of spiritual childhood. What the heart is to the body in the physical life, love is to the soul in the spiritual life. It is the heart which vivifies all the members and all the organs of the body; it is love which, from the supernatural point of view, vivifies all the powers and all the faculties of the soul. If charity does not animate works, they are dead. On the other hand, as soon as it permeates them, it renders them living and meritorious. In that sense, we may compare charity to the sap of the trees, wherever the sap circulates, there is life; wherever it ceases, there is death.

But the sap is not everywhere equally rich and vivifying. Its virtue is known by the abundance and the quality of the fruits, the most prolific tree of its kind always being the one in which the sap, more generous and better directed, reaches the fruits more abundantly to form and to nourish them.

I.—Love, the Distinctive Mark of the Holiness of Blessed Thérèse, is Pre-eminently the Virtue of Children

Now what constitutes the excellence of the life of spiritual childhood and its great supernatural fecundity is that Love is its whole sap, and that this

divine sap constantly tends to expand into flowers and fruits of virtue. In this life, all is love, all proceeds from love, and all ends in love.

Not that the other virtues have not in it their own place and their own importance. We know that Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus neglected none of them, and that she practised them all in an heroic degree. But in her, charity stood forth in the midst of the other virtues as a queen amongst her attendants. Charity held the sceptre; it directed and governed all—or, rather, it begot, bore, and nurtured all the other virtues of which it inspired every act. Still, not in such a way as to take away from them their particular character or to suppress the motives proper to each of them. But on every occasion it added to these a motive of love, which very quickly became the dominant motive of her conduct, and that made of her whole life one uninterrupted act of Love.

In that way there was in the fertile garden of her soul but one plot in which the flowers of all the virtues germinated, sprang up, and bloomed, and that was the choice parterre of Love. Therefore, all the flowers that sprang up in it, of whatever variety, were the flowers of Love.

Thus Thérèse was humble through conviction of her nothingness. But she was so, still more, through love of Jesus and to give Him pleasure.

To win Thy love a child will I remain,
And self-forgetting, will delight Thy Heart.

She was generous because she understood that one must be so in order to attain to holiness. But she was so, above all, because *when we love we reckon not.*

She practised renunciation doubtless because it is a necessary condition for spiritual progress, but still more in order to show to Jesus the delicacy of her love: *It costs us dear to give Him all He asks, but what a joy that it does cost! Let us refuse Him no sacrifice. He does so want our love!*

She aroused herself to confidence, of necessity, through the feeling of her powerlessness, but also and even much more through the natural inclination of her childlike heart. For the child loves to trust. *Besides, parents, if rich, refuse nothing to their child. It is my title of child*, she said, *that gives me all my daring.*[1]

Confidence leads to abandonment. But Love leads to it more perfectly still. In Blessed Thérèse, love was the special form of abandonment—love that surrenders itself without reserve and without reckoning, because it is happy to surrender itself, seeing therein an especially refined manner of proving its tenderness. While yet very young, she had *offered herself to the Child Jesus to be His little plaything . . . a little ball of no value, that He might throw to the ground, toss about, pierce, leave in a corner, or else press to His Heart, if it so pleased Him. In a word, she wanted to amuse the little Jesus, and to give herself up to all His childlike fancies.*[2] As we see, the point of view of personal interest in no way enters into such an act of abandonment. One motive only inspires it—to give joy to Jesus, to give Him pleasure at all cost. That is love indeed.

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xi.
[2] *Ibid.*, chap. vi.

So too is it with her zeal. Assuredly, the souls that are lost inspire Sœur Thérèse with great compassion. But what she proposes to herself especially in labouring for their salvation, is to give to our Lord more hearts to love Him: *There is one only thing to do here below*, she would repeat—*to love Jesus, to save souls for Him that He may be eternally loved.*[1]

Finally, in her hope, what makes her heart thrill most sweetly is not the thought of the glory of Heaven. She leaves that glory to her brothers, the angels and saints, as being due to them by right. For her part, it is love that attracts her towards her eternal home. Oh! to love, to be loved, and to come back to earth to make Love loved.[2]

The spiritual life, thus understood, is truly a life of holy childhood, modelled on that of little children, in whom nothing is of any worth, nothing operates but love. Powerless for all else, the little one is capable only of loving. But he loves, as he breathes, instinctively, without effort, and his love, which cannot manifest itself in important works, is at least conveyed by his every movement, by his smile, by his caresses and kisses, and even by his tears, when, frightened or suffering, he presses more closely to his mother's heart. The child is love only; but he is all love. And is it not that which gives him so many charms in the eyes of his father and mother, and even of those who would pass by unheeding, but who cannot resist the attraction of his childlike smile?

[1] VI^e lettre à sa sœur Céline.
[2] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

And it is that, too, which in Blessed Thérèse has so gently ravished the Heart of the good God that He has become, as it were, incapable of resisting her desires and her prayers. She herself was persuaded of this, and it was certainly her intention to convince us of it when, a few days before her death, she said: *I want to give my little way to souls. I want to make known to them the simple means that have so perfectly succeeded for me, to tell them that there is but one only thing to do here below: to cast down before Jesus the flowers of little sacrifices, to win Him by caresses! That is how I have won Him, and that is why I shall be so well received.*[1]

In order that we, too, may be well received by Jesus, let us frequent the school of Blessed Thérèse, so as to learn from her how we must desire, understand, and exercise love, to arrive like her at the perfection of Love!

II.—How We must Desire Love and Accustom Ourselves Early to do All for Love's Sake

All the most ardent desires of Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus tended to Love. She looked upon Love as her special vocation: *In the heart of the Church my Mother*, she wrote, *I will be Love! . . .*

And again: *What I ask for is Love! . . .*

O Jesus, I ask of Thee only peace! . . . peace, and above all LOVE—*love without bound or limit.*[2]

I have no longer any desire unless it be to love Jesus

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.
[2] *Ibid.*, chap. xiii.

to folly! Yes, LOVE *it is that draws me. I know of one means only by which to attain to perfection:* LOVE. *Let us love, since our heart is made for nothing else:*[1]

So the science of sciences in her eyes was the one that would teach her to love as much as she desired. To acquire it, no sacrifice should appear too great: *The science of love! Sweet is the echo of that word to the ear of my soul. I desire no other science. Having given all my substance for it, like the spouse in the Canticles, I think that I have given nothing.*[2]

All the aspirations of her ardent soul are crystallized in these words: *Jesus! I would so love Him! Love Him as never yet He has been loved.*[3] And her last words were but the echo of her whole life: *Oh! I love Him! . . . My God . . . I love . . . Thee. . . .*

Thus did she realize her dream: *To live on Love! . . . To die of Love!*

At the close of her short life, reflecting on the graces with which she had been loaded, Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus cried out: *O my God! Thy love has gone before me even from my childhood, it has grown with my growth, and now it is an abyss the depths of which I cannot fathom!*

Deposited in the soul of each of us like a mysterious germ, on the day of our Baptism, Divine Charity in us too wants only to expand and to grow. And how much is it not to be desired that its development be encouraged from our earliest years!

Happy the child whom a prudent and Christian

[1] Lettre à Marie Guérin.
[2] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. viii.
[3] IVe lettre à la R.M. Agnès de Jésus.

mother early teaches to develop that germ and to turn that great treasure to account, by accustoming him to obey, to pray, to be charitable, to make little sacrifices *for love of the good God!* Happy child of a happy mother!

But it is above all when a soul sets herself seriously to the service of God that it is important to instil into her the desire and the esteem of holy Love, and that it is useful to accustom her from the outset to do all for Love's sake. That will not prevent her from applying herself to the other virtues, and especially to those which are more necessary for beginners, nor from correcting her faults. On the contrary, it will be another and a very urgent reason for applying herself to do so with greater care and greater fervour. And let it not be said that, since Love is to be the crowning of the edifice of perfection, it would be a mistake to begin with it, as it is with it we must end. Yes, true it is that the perfection of Love must complete the edifice. But from that it does not follow that Love cannot and ought not to direct its whole construction. Let us begin with Love, let us continue with Love, and we shall see that there is no better artisan of perfection than Love. None builds more quickly, none more solidly, none more majestically, none more beautifully, because love makes all things light and easy, and because to him that loveth, as St Augustine remarks, nothing is hard, or if something be hard, love rejoices for that and labours all the more earnestly on account of it.

Let us love then, Sœur Thérèse took delight in

saying, *let us love, since our heart is made for nothing else.* Let us love, and whatever degree of the spiritual life we may have attained to, let us not hesitate to enter on the way of Love, to value, to desire and to ask for Love above all.

And the good God, in giving us this gift, will give us grace to understand it. For we may misunderstand it. But on this point also, Sœur Thérèse will serve as our guide and her way is sure. Following her we err not.

III.—In what Consists the Exercise of Love

How then in practice did Blessed Thérèse understand Love?

1. *Always to Seek to give Pleasure to the Good God.*

It seems to us that we may sum up what she has said of it in this formula: *To love is to be always occupied in giving pleasure to the good God*, and for that to profit by the least opportunities, and to put all the refinement and generosity of which we are capable into those little gifts of love which we offer to Him continually.

She explained it as clearly as possible in the following words towards the end of her life: *I have ever remained little, having no other occupation except to gather flowers, the flowers of love and of sacrifice, and to offer them to the good God for His pleasure.*[1]

[1] Souvenirs inédits.

This watchful care *to give pleasure to the good God* animated her constantly even in the least actions, dominating the other supernatural motives, excluding all motive of personal interest.

And she summed up in those words, *to give pleasure to the good God*, the whole secret of holiness, not only for herself, but for others. *If you wish to become a saint*, she wrote to one of her sisters, *that will be easy for you. Have but one end only: to give pleasure to Jesus.*

The matter is well worthy of notice, and whoever wishes to walk in the little way of love ought to pay great attention to it.

But the means of giving pleasure, of always giving pleasure to the good God, where are they?

2. *To Strew before Jesus the Flowers of Little Sacrifices.*

Blessed Thérèse again will explain in a manner as luminous as it is pleasing; the passage is so instructive that we must cite it in full.

How shall I show my love, since love is proved by deeds? Well, the little child will strew flowers . . . she will embalm the Divine Throne with their fragrance, she will sing with silvery voice the Canticle of Love.

Yes, my Beloved, it is thus my life's brief day shall be spent before Thee. No other means have I of proving my love than to strew flowers; that is, to let no little sacrifice escape me, not a look, not a word; to make use of the very least actions and do them for love. I wish to suffer for Love's sake, and

for Love's sake even to rejoice; thus shall I strew flowers. Not one shall I find without shedding its petals for Thee . . . and then I will sing, I will always sing, even if I must gather my roses in the very midst of thorns—and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.[1]

As we see, nothing could be simpler than this way of conceiving the practice of holy Love. It is so simple that anybody can grasp it; even a child could understand it; and that is not surprising since it is Love put within the reach of little ones. To love is, then, to act in all things through Love; it is to do all, to accept all, to suffer all with a view to giving pleasure to the good God *because we love.* Once more, what could be more simple?

Nothing either more easy or more practical. Anyone, no matter whom, can do it with a good will and the help of grace. And God never refuses this grace to those who ask it. And it is always and everywhere possible, in all conditions of life and states of the soul, as well in aridities and powerlessness as in the midst of consolations. Listen to Blessed Thérèse discovering to us the little ingenious ways of her ever watchful love: *In times of aridity, when I am incapable of praying, of practising virtue, I seek little opportunities, mere trifles, to give pleasure to Jesus—for instance, a smile, a pleasant word when inclined to be silent and to show weariness. If I have no opportunities, I at least tell Him again and again that I love Him; that is not difficult, and it keeps alive the fire in my heart. Even though this fire of love might*

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xi.

seem to me extinct, I would still throw little straws upon the embers, and I am certain it would rekindle.[1]

3. *To Profit by the Least Opportunities and not to Lose One.*

Ordinarily there are only very little things that the soul can offer to the good God. Has not Blessed Thérèse said, in speaking of herself: *I am a very little soul who has never been able to do any but very little things.* Now precisely because Love here disposes of very little things only, it does not wish to lose any of them: *I do not wish,* wrote Sœur Thérèse, *that creatures should possess a single atom of my love; I wish to give all to Jesus. . . . All shall be for Him, all! And even when I have nothing to offer Him I will give Him that nothing.* Truly, it is impossible to go further in self-surrender. It is "all for Jesus" practised unceasingly; it is the soul persistently given up to all the exigencies of Divine Love, watchful for every opportunity of overcoming self, of forgetting self in order to please God ever and always. For it is a question *of letting no little sacrifice pass.* Not only will the little child strew flowers, but *not one* shall she find without shedding its petals before Jesus through love of Him.

Not one! Oh, how far that goes! Only a great heart can conceive such a desire: only a soul determined to forget self always can realize it. Those little sacrifices, taken separately, seem mere trifles. But when constantly practised, what continual appli-

[1] XVIe lettre à sa sœur Céline.
[2] VIIe lettre à la R.M. Agnès de Jésus.

cation, what universal renunciation, what generosity they imply!

This is what has not been understood by some who have grasped only the fascinating side of the life of Blessed Thérèse. They believed that the "little way," so sweet and so easy does it appear under the pen of "little Thérèse," was a means of arriving at perfection without paying the cost. But no, it is not, and cannot be so. For there is only one way to salvation—the narrow way described by Jesus. And in that way there is but one manner of advancing in the footsteps of our Divine Master—which is by practising what He has said: "If any man will come after Me and be My Disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

This is why, if renunciation and sacrifice had not their place marked out on the way of childhood, we should be compelled to say that this way is erroneous. But the truth, on the contrary, is that abnegation there meets us at every step. What has given rise to the false impression is that Love, in transforming sacrifice, has so permeated it with sweetness and invested it with so many attractions, that in it the cross disappears beneath the flowers. But the cross is ever there, and those flowers have cost much in the gathering, for often have they had to be sought in the very midst of thorns and at the price of wounds very painful to sensitive nature. True it is that no one noticed the child being wounded, because his suffering was ever accompanied by the Canticle of Love, and because the longer and sharper the thorns the sweeter was his song. But is not this the height and the

perfection of abnegation, not only to suffer willingly, but to sing in the midst of suffering, and to sing all the more joyously the more intense the suffering, and to do so every day, constantly, from morning till night, even unto death?

4. *Not to Suffer only, but to Rejoice for Love's Sake.*

However, everything in life is not unmingled suffering. We encounter also good and lawful joys, some merely permitted, others willed by the good God. Must we then renounce them? Or, if we accept them, if we concede them, shall they remain outside of Love as if they escaped its action? And shall there then be hours in life when, with the absence of sorrow, love, too, shall be wanting?

Certainly not! A heart truly loving could not bear that. Love is consuming. It makes fuel of everything, and all serves to intensify its flame. Besides, it purposes to leave nothing in the soul or in life outside its influence. This is why, in the little way where Love plays so important a part, where it is the principal resource of the soul, everything, absolutely everything, joys as well as sorrows, can and ought to serve as nourishment for love.

Thus thought and acted Blessed Thérèse. Besides, she knew too well the Heart of the good God, more tender than a mother's heart, to think that our love is not pleasing to Him except when exercised in the midst of suffering. What a strange Father He would be, indeed, if He were pleased only to see us suffering! But no, it is not so. "Little Thérèse" said on the

contrary, that *the good God finds it very hard, owing to His great love for us, to have to leave us on earth to complete our time of trial, and that He must rejoice at seeing us smile.* And so, with equal happiness, she offered to Him her joys and her sorrows.

She wrote: *It seems to me that if we take Jesus captive by our sacrifices, our joys enchain Him too. For that it suffices not to concentrate on selfish happiness, but to offer to our Spouse the little joys He scatters on our path to delight our hearts and raise them up to Him.*[1]

We may well believe that she attached great importance to this point of her "little doctrine," for she returns to it frequently in her writings, and particularly in her poems, where she pours forth the choicest sentiments of her soul.

My griefs, my joys, my sacrifices small—
Behold my flowers.

Let us cite also these words, which seem to us to sum up best her thought: *I wish to suffer for Love's sake, and for Love's sake even to rejoice. . . .* In that short phrase, "little Thérèse" depicts herself fully, and with a flash of light shows to little souls the road to follow in order to live on Love.

5. *In this "All for Love's Sake" to be ever Smiling upon the Good God—Refinement in Love.*

Joys or sorrows, they are in general only very little things that a childlike soul can offer to the good God. So, in order to give them greater value—for in the

[1] IIIe lettre à sa sœur Léonie.

eyes of Love they never have enough—she desires to put into the offering which she makes of them the greatest possible tenderness. Such was the constant care of "little Thérèse," and nothing is so touching as the refinement of her love for the good God.

In the first place, she did not wish that He should ever have the least cause of trouble on her account. And because, when we love someone very much, we are always grieved to see him suffer, feeling herself loved by the good God, she strove in some manner to hide her sufferings from Him. To speak the truth, that could only be playfulness or an invention of love on her part, since nothing escapes the Divine gaze. But, as she somewhere remarks, when one loves one does and says foolish things. And her love, not knowing how to express itself, was manifested in this touching manner.

Therefore, in face of every sacrifice as of every suffering, she had accustomed herself always to smile.

In the same way she smiled upon the good God when He tried her, and all the more sweetly the more He seemed to try her. And in that smile she found her purest joy. She made of it her Heaven on earth. She sang:

My Heaven is to smile on the God I adore,
When He hideth Himself my faith to prove;
To smile—awaiting His return once more. . . .
My Heaven is Love![1]

She smiled on a penance which was particularly painful to her *so that*, she said, *the good God, as*

[1] "Mon Ciel à moi."

though deceived by the expression of her countenance, might not know that she was suffering.[1]

She smiled on every manifestation of God's holy will: *I love Him so much*, she said, *that I am always content with what He sends me . . . I love all that He does. . . . My God, Thou fillest me with joy in all Thou dost.*[2]

Neither would she have wished to give her Heavenly Father occasion to refuse her the least thing, feeling that that might cause Him even the slightest pain. That was why she never asked any temporal grace for herself, fearing lest her desire might not be conformable to the Divine good pleasure; and when obedience commanded her to do so, she knew how to arrange in such a way as to leave the good God perfectly free to hear her or not, assuring Him in case of need that if He heard her not, she would love Him all the more. Or else she would turn to the Blessed Virgin, who, she said, then set aright her little desires and submitted them to the good God or not, according as she deemed well.

Someone perhaps may be inclined to smile in face of these refinements of Love. But rather, if he knows even in the least degree, by experience, the Heart of our Lord, if ever he has felt a little of the profound happiness that it is for a loving soul to call herself the child of God, if he has understood something of Love, he will bless with his whole soul and thank the goodness of Him who, in His ineffable mercy, permits to a poor creature such loving rela-

[1] Souvenirs inédits. [2] *Ibid.*

tions with His infinite Majesty. He will implore for himself the grace to appreciate ever more perfectly a mystery which is revealed to none but to little ones and the humble.

Meanwhile, he will take good care not to condemn in others a different manner of acting in what concerns the desire of temporal favours, on condition of their not being an obstacle to the acquisition of eternal goods. The request for them made to the good God may be very pleasing to Him, and Blessed Thérèse from the heights of Heaven seems to encourage it, as the great number of favours of this kind attributed to her intercession testifies. But before her death, she took care to make known that in Heaven she would act as on earth, and that before presenting her requests, *she would begin by looking into the eyes of the good God, to see if it be His good pleasure.*[1]

And if now we wish to have the ultimate reason of so much tenderness and generosity spent in loving the good God, these words, springing from the heart of "little Thérèse" shall tell us the whole secret of it.

At my death, when I shall see the good God—so good—who will load me with tender caresses for all eternity, and I shall no longer be able to prove to Him my love by sacrifices, this will be impossible for me to bear, if on earth I shall not have done all I could to give Him pleasure.[2]

[1] Souvenirs inédits. [2] Notes inédites.

CHAPTER VI

Love (*continued*)

2. The Divine Lift—The Oblation to the Merciful Love of the Good God

WHEN a soul has practised with an unfailing generosity and an ever-watchful tenderness what has just been said concerning the exercise of charity, it does indeed seem as though she should at the same time attain to the perfection of Love.

But this divine love, which has incredible exigencies, has still greater wants. In vain doth the heart of a saint give itself, dedicate itself, and spend itself without measure; it is never satisfied. Never does it say: Enough. Already so great, it aspires to grow greater in some manner even to infinity. The energies of created love no longer suffice. Too much straitened within its human limits, it seeks to go forth and lose itself in the shoreless and fathomless abyss of eternal Love.

But here it is no longer for the creature to act: his action must be effaced before that of the Omnipotent.

In the little way of childhood, this point of view of the Divine action in the soul is very important. Not that this doctrine is peculiar to our Beata, being as old as the doctrine of grace. But what is new is the manner in which she presents it to us, the very opportune application she makes of it to little souls, thus giving to them all, even to the

weakest, the means of reaching the highest summit of Divine Love.

This is what we may call the theory of *the Divine Lift*, which, like every theory well understood, requires a practical application, which is *the act of oblation as a victim of holocaust to the merciful Love of the good God.*

I.—The Divine Lift

In order to understand what follows, some preliminary explanations are again necessary.

All the supernatural virtues have their primary source in God, and it is His grace which, in Baptism, puts the germs of them in our souls. Those germs want only to be developed, and it is the end of the Christian life to make them grow unto their full bloom. The Christian is perfect when he has attained to the perfection of all the virtues.

Now the virtues grow in us in two ways: either by our own efforts aided by grace, or by a simple effect of the liberality of God acting directly in the soul. The first requires much time; the second, very little. Because all things are possible to God, and His action, unlike ours, is not dependent on time. Thus He was able, at the instant of its creation, to enrich the soul of His Holy Mother with a plenitude of grace and virtues to which neither Angels nor Saints can ever approach. Thus also, an instant sufficed for the Holy Ghost to transform the Apostles into new men, and to make of these timid and ignorant men souls of light and of fire with an indomitable courage.

Clearly it was of this wonderful and all-powerful action of grace Sœur Thérèse was thinking when she wrote: *It seems to me that the good God does not need years to accomplish His work of love in a soul; one ray from His Heart can, in an instant, make His flower bloom for eternity.*[1]

These words deserve to be dwelt upon, because they prove that in the judgement of Blessed Thérèse, the work of our sanctification is in the Hands of God before being in ours, and that its success depends more on Him than on us, since she calls it *His work of love.*

Doubtless it is the work, too, of the soul. We now know enough of the sentiments of Sœur Thérèse to have no doubt about that. We know how far, in what concerned it, she carried her generosity, her tenderness, her spirit of renunciation and sacrifice in the exercise of a love ever employed in forgetting self for the sake of the good God. But although *from the age of three years, she never refused the good God anything*, it was not on her good works or on her present dispositions she relied to attain, according to her own expression, to the plenitude of Love. She counted on God alone.

When, having in her heart *the desire of becoming a great saint*, *she saw herself for the first time at the foot of the high mountain of holiness*, she understood that, being mere weakness and powerlessness, she was far *too little to climb the rugged steps of perfection.*[2]

[1] VIe lettre à sa sœur Céline.

[2] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. ix.

Without being discouraged, for she knew that the good God does not inspire unrealizable desires, she immediately set about looking for a little way wholly new, very straight, and very short, to go to Heaven.[1]

Thinking then of those lifts which we see in the houses of the rich, she desired for herself also a heavenly lift. But where find this mysterious lift? She sought in the Scriptures; she re-awakened memories of the past, and doubtless the thought came to her of that touching scene, which she somewhere describes, of a very little child at the bottom of a staircase which he tries to climb, but cannot, so small is he, reach even to the first step. Then he calls, he cries out, he struggles, his mother hears him and comes down; she takes him, and carries him off. . . . The arms of the mother, behold the lift of the little one. Well! the arms of Jesus shall be her lift. . . . For Jesus is more tender than a mother. He is eternal Wisdom. And it is that same Wisdom who has said: "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me!" And again: "As a mother caresseth her child, so will I comfort you, I will carry you upon My bosom, and I will cradle you upon My knees."

And it is in that, we believe, the chief originality of the "little way" of childhood consists, and that it is which makes it truly a way *wholly new, very short and very straight for attaining to perfection:* to put ourselves into the hands of the good God, and by force of confidence, love and abandonment,

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. ix.

be carried by Him, by means of a perfect correspondence with grace, to the highest summits of Charity. Thus it is God will do all. As for the soul, she shall do nothing but be docile to the interior movements which her Divine bearer will impress upon her, and her sole occupation will be to love Him. She will exert herself to give Him joy, whilst He carries her in His almighty Arms.

We must, however, carefully note that she could not give Him joy if she were to slumber in an indolent quietude. The sleep of the soul in the arms of God does not exclude vigilance. "I sleep, but my heart watcheth," says the Spouse in the Canticles. I sleep; that is abandonment; but my heart watcheth: that is the part of the soul's activity and her correspondence with grace. Even at the highest point of abandonment this part of activity continues. It does not suffice to surrender ourselves once for all to the Divine action. As this action is continual, we must bring to it a continual co-operation.

This remark was necessary in order to avoid errors of interpretation. But with this reservation, it is correct to say that, when the soul has taken her place in the Divine Lift, the only thing her Heavenly Father demands of her is to surrender herself without reserve to His Love so that it may wholly consume her, as also without resistance to His providence so that He may guide her freely.

The soul surrenders herself to Love by her offering of herself as victim; she surrenders herself to Providence by establishing herself in complete abandonment.

II.—The Oblation of Self as a Victim of Holocaust to the Merciful Love of the Good God

Thus it is that the oblation to the merciful Love of the good God and the life of abandonment form the natural outcome of the life of spiritual childhood.

Perhaps it may be useful to remark, first, that this offering with all its consequences is not, in the "little way" a side-issue, a sort of accessory that we may, if we choose, add to the rest, but which has, after all, only a secondary importance. On the contrary, it represents, in the eyes of Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus and according to her sayings, *the very basis of the sentiments of her heart;*[1] it sums up all her *little doctrine;* it is *the most consoling dream of her life.* Those are the expressions she uses when, at the beginning of the third and last manuscript, which terminates the Story of her soul, she broaches the subject of which we here treat.

1. *How Blessed Thérèse was led to Make this Act of Oblation.*

How was Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus led to offer herself as a victim of holocaust to the merciful Love of the good God? It was, no doubt, because the interior Master, Jesus, who loves to reveal Himself to little ones and to the humble, Himself taught her this secret of perfection.

But it is easy to follow in the "Story of a Soul" (*Histoire d'une Ame*) the progress of the interior

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xi.

workings which brought her so rapidly to this point. Like everything that God did in her, it is the work of Love.

Two great loves, indeed, that which she had for the good God and that which she felt confident the good God had for her, mingling together in her heart, enkindled the one by the other, aroused in her from the very first an ardent desire of being wholly transformed into Love so as to be able to render to Jesus love for love—that is to say, to love Him, if possible, as much as she saw herself loved by Him.

From thence that leading desire never to refuse Him anything; to strew before Him incessantly the flowers of little sacrifices; to suffer for Love's sake, to rejoice for Love's sake, to do all for Love's sake.

But, as we have already remarked, what are such works to satisfy such a need of loving?

In a glowing page, traced in lines of fire, and one of the last she wrote, Blessed Thérèse tells us what, in face of her powerlessness, the ambitions of her heart were, and how, feeling in herself at once every desire and every vocation, she would have wished, in order to give to Jesus every possible proof of her love, to be able to fight together with the Crusaders and like them fall on the battlefield; to enlighten souls like the Doctors, and with the Apostles and Missionaries of every age to preach continually and throughout the whole earth the holy Name of Jesus, so as to plant the Cross on the shores of every land; to suffer, in fine, the torments of all the Martyrs and die all their deaths.

But those are impossible things, for obedience holds her powerless in the depths of her Carmel. Still, if she cannot act, preach, or shed her blood, she can at least love. . . . And since it is love which animates all the Saints, to such an extent that *if Love were to die away in the heart of the Church, apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, martyrs would refuse to shed their blood*, she understands that *love comprises all vocations, that love is everything, that it embraces all times and all places because it is eternal.* She understands that, through Love, she will realize all her desires, and that, if she can become *Love*—that is to say, be wholly transformed into Love—she will be and will do all she longed to be and to do. Then it is that Love appears to her as her special vocation, and she cries out: *My vocation, at last I have found it! My vocation is Love! Yes, I have found my place in the bosom of the Church, and this place, O my God, Thou Thyself hast given it to me. In the heart of the Church my Mother, I will be Love. . . . Thus I shall be all; thus will my dream be realized.*[1]

But the best means of being transformed into Love, is it not to draw to oneself, in order to be consumed by it, the Love which is in God or rather which is God Himself? For God is charity.[2]

As such He is a fire and a consuming fire.[3] Now when wood is exposed to fire, it burns. In the same way, if a soul were to expose herself to the flames of Love pent up in the Heart of God, would not she too

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xi.
[2] I John iv 16. [3] Deut. iv 24.

be consumed? And just as the wood becomes fire by contact with fire, would not she become Love by contact with Love? We can have no doubt about it if only we consider the ardour of Divine Charity. Well! to do that is nothing else than to offer oneself as a holocaust to the Merciful Love of the good God. In that way the soul will be enabled to render to her Father in Heaven love for love and to love Him as she is loved by Him, since she will have thus found the means of appropriating to herself the flames of Love of which the Blessed Trinity is the eternal source. To love the good God she will have at her disposal the very love, and, if we may say so, the very Heart of God.

At the same time, she will satisfy one of the most earnest desires of this Adorable Heart, which is to diffuse Its Love. The need of loving and of being loved is infinite in God, and this need is, in truth, fully satisfied in the very bosom of the Blessed Trinity. But Love, like all good—and it is the greatest of goods—has an extreme tendency to communicate itself; and it was in order to be able to diffuse His Love that God created the world, and in particular angels and man. Well, many of the angels have, as we know, refused the offer He made to them of His Divine tenderness, and now having put themselves wholly and for ever outside the pale of Love, they are henceforth only hatred and the object of hatred. As for men, the majority of them scornfully reject His loving advances. Thus act not only the disciples of the world, but even a very large number of Jesus Christ's own disciples. How rare are

they indeed who surrender themselves unreservedly to the tenderness of His infinite Love! Still the good God ceases not to urge them in the most touching manner. Continually repulsed, He returns continually to the charge. He multiplies His kindnesses, His calls, His acts of forgiveness. But most often it is all in vain. What then will become of that infinite Love with which Jesus wishes to set the world ablaze, but of which the world wants nothing? Shall it for ever remain pent up, powerless, in the bosom of the Adorable Trinity?

We know the words of our Lord to St Margaret Mary: "I seek a heart in which to repose My suffering Love which the world disdains."

Our Beata, too, understood the complaint of the Divine Heart. She said to herself that if souls were to offer themselves as victims of holocaust to His Love, the good God, glad not to restrict the flames of infinite tenderness pent up within Him, would not fail to consume them rapidly. And immediately she offers herself to receive into her heart all the Love that sinners disdain. Then it is that she cries out: *O Jesus, let me be that happy victim! Consume Thy little holocaust in the fire of Divine Love.*

It was on the 9th of June, 1895, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, that Blessed Thérèse pronounced her Act of Oblation as victim of holocaust to the merciful Love of the good God. Assuredly this date deserves to be remembered. Because it consecrates a memorable day for the little souls called to walk in her footsteps on her little way of Love: the day which saw made on earth and ratified in Heaven the con-

secration of the first of the little victims of merciful Love. To the victims offered and immolated to the Justice of God shall be added henceforth in the Church the victims consecrated and immolated to His infinite Love. And it shall be to the eternal glory of Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus to have, by a very special design of Divine Providence, opened up and traced the way for them, rendering it accessible to even the humblest and weakest souls, provided they be generous and confident, and consent to surrender themselves unreservedly to the infinite Mercy of the good God.

2. *In what consists the Act of Oblation of Ourselves to Merciful Love?*

In order to form for ourselves a proper idea of it, it is best to go back to the formula which Blessed Thérèse drew up for herself, and which conveys to us exactly her thought. The full text of it will be found at the end of this work. We transcribe here the last lines only, as they are the essential part of it.

O my God, Most Blessed Trinity, in order to live in one act of perfect Love, *I offer myself as a victim of holocaust to Thy Merciful Love*, imploring Thee to consume me unceasingly, and to let the flood of *infinite tenderness* pent up in Thee overflow into my soul, that so I may become a very martyr of Thy Love, O my God!

May this martyrdom, having first prepared me to appear before Thee, break life's thread at last, and may my soul take its flight, unretarded, into the eternal embrace of *Thy Merciful Love.*

I desire, O Well-Beloved, at every heart-beat to renew this oblation an infinite number of times, till the shadows decline and I can tell Thee my love *eternally face to face!*

Let us first remark that it is a question of an oblation of ourselves to the merciful Love of the good God, and that in making it we offer ourselves to this infinite Love in order to draw it to us.

If accepted then its first effect ought to be to cause the love of the Heart of the good God to overflow into the soul who has offered herself. Consequently, she remains before Him like a little vase in front of the ocean: the act of oblation has opened the floodgate and hollowed out the channel through which the waters will pass unretarded. Henceforth this happy soul shall be inundated with Love.

Inundated with mercies, too, for in God, Love, when directed to creatures, cannot but be a merciful Love. To draw Love to ourselves is, then, to draw to ourselves the abundance of Divine mercies.

Blessed Thérèse uses yet another expression which she was careful to underline. She speaks of tenderness. She implores the good God "to let the flood of *infinite tenderness* pent up in Him overflow into her soul." This is because she does not forget that God is a Father, and that the love which descends from the heart of a father into the heart of his child presents itself under the most sweet form of tenderness. It is this infinite tenderness, then, that she calls into her soul and to which she surrenders herself.

Comparison with the Oblation to Divine Justice.

Thence we see the difference there is between an oblation to the Justice of God and the oblation to His merciful Love.

To offer ourselves to Justice is to call down upon ourselves the chastisements reserved for sinners, and thus to enable Divine Justice to satisfy itself whilst sparing the culprits. By virtue of that oblation, the victim-soul appears in the Church like a lightning-conductor raised upwards towards Heaven to attract the thunderbolt and preserve the neighbouring buildings from it. And, as Blessed Thérèse remarks, that offering is noble and generous, since by it we ask to suffer that others may be spared. We cannot, in truth, serve as a lightning-conductor except by agreeing to serve as a target for the anger of God exasperated against the crimes of the world.

Victims of Love vow themselves not to the Justice of God, but to His infinite tenderness. They do not offer themselves directly to suffer, but to love and to be loved; nor as victims of expiation to repair, but as victims of holocaust to be wholly consumed. They are not the conductor which attracts the lightning, but the victim exposed to the fire of Heaven in order to receive its flames.[1]

We do not wish to set up a comparison between those two offerings from the point of view of excellence, but only to remark that if, by reason of possible consequences, one must look twice and be very prudent before offering oneself as a victim to Divine Justice,

[1] I Mach. i.

this is not the case where there is question of the oblation to Merciful Love. Because this latter has in it nothing calculated to frighten any soul; neither those that are little and feeble, since its end is to draw the flood of infinite tenderness, and since none more need tenderness than little ones; nor those who see themselves still very imperfect and poor in virtue, since its effect is to make mercy superabound where misery had abounded; nor those who, being timid, would fear, perhaps, the consequences of this act of oblation.

For true it is that in it there is question of a victim and of a victim of holocaust, which means an entire immolation, and there is mention in it also of martyrdom.

But let it be noted well: it is not a question of a martyrdom of suffering, but of a martyrdom of Love; that is to say, of a martyrdom which is the direct work of Love, in which, consequently, it is Love itself which immolates and consumes the victim.

Blessed Thérèse makes that clearly understood by the expressions which she uses in her Act of Oblation when, after having implored the good God to consume her without ceasing by letting the flood of infinite tenderness pent up in Him overflow into her soul, she immediately adds: and *that so* I may become a very martyr of Thy Love, O my God!

The expression "that so" is precious to bear in mind. It proves that in the thought of Blessed Thérèse the martyrdom of Love comes to the soul directly from the very fullness of the flood of infinite tenderness which bursts in upon her, whose weight

and intensity she could not support without enduring a veritable martyrdom.

But who does not see also that such a martyrdom must bring with it much of austere sweetness in the midst of its inevitable rigours, and how good it must be to live on it, and how much better still it must be to die of it! Such was exactly the idea that Blessed Thérèse formed of it for herself when she wrote:

To die of pure Love is a martyrdom sweet,
It is that which I fain would endure.

The Act of Oblation to Merciful Love and its Consequences from the Point of View of Suffering.

Now here a question arises: Is this martyrdom of Love exempt, then, from suffering? Or, if there be suffering in it, what exactly is its function?

Let us say at once that there is no martyrdom without pain, not even the martyrdom of Love. For if, according to the testimony of the "Imitation," we cannot live in Love without suffering, much less can we, without suffering, live on Love and die of Love.

But here is the place to recall first the beautiful saying of St Augustine: To him who loveth, nothing is hard. Or, if something be hard, that becomes a suffering loved, and this suffering is sweet in the eyes of Love.

Then again we must remark that suffering, here, is not the end or direct effect of the Act of Oblation. It may become a consequence of it. But it is not to suffering or with a view to suffering that we conse-

crate ourselves; we consecrate ourselves to Love with a view to Love.

Only it is true that Love bears in itself a germ of suffering, and that this germ usually develops with it. It is impossible to love God ardently without suffering.

It is a suffering, in the first place, to see Him so little loved and so gravely offended.

Again, not to love Him ourselves as much as we desire. We suffer from the narrowness and the powerlessness of a heart which can now no longer suffice to contain the flood of tenderness that comes to it from the Heart of God, and by which it is, as it were, submerged.

The soul that loves Jesus suffers too, or rather aspires to suffer and of herself tends towards suffering, because in her eyes suffering is no longer that repellent thing, so hard to nature, from which everyone shrinks: it is Jesus suffering who extends His arms to her. Love invites to resemblance, and Jesus is *a Spouse of blood.*

Love urges on to generosity, and there are exchanges of Love which can be made only on the Cross. Love, in fine, tends with all its force to union, and since the Cross has been the death-bed of Jesus, it has become the sacred abode whither He, the Divine King of Love, invites souls, His chaste spouses, to come and consummate their union with Him in suffering and in death.

There is yet another reason why every soul that loves Jesus ardently loves suffering, too, and joyfully accepts it. It is because she finds in each cross

that presents itself to her a most efficacious means of "purchasing souls for Him." To love Jesus suffices not for her love; she wants at all cost to gain over to Him other hearts that will love Him eternally. She wants to save sinners for Him. But sinners are saved only by the application made to them of the infinite merits of the Saviour. Grace alone can convert them, and grace, the fruit of the bloody sacrifice of Calvary, often reaches their souls by a mysterious channel hollowed out and kept clear by the voluntary immolations of pure souls continuing in the mystical Body of Christ the sacrifice of the Cross. Those whom Jesus Christ has purchased by His death we can save by suffering.

For all those reasons suffering is the inseparable companion of Love. Still, great as its necessity and its importance may be, with victims of Love it has no more than a secondary function. It goes only in the second place and ever under the guidance of Love.

We must here answer an objection.

Will not the good God, to whom we surrender ourselves by the oblation to merciful Love, at least avail Himself of it to send crosses and trials without measure?

Without measure? Certainly not! The trials willed by the good God are never willed without measure, but always proportioned to the supernatural energies which an ever-preventing grace has been careful to develop previously in the soul. There is always proportion between the trial and the Divine help.

But will not God at least send exceptional suffer-

ings which He would never have demanded but for this oblation to Love? That is His own affair and His own secret, and it depends on the designs He has on each particular soul. Let us say merely that it is not a necessary consequence of the Act of Oblation.

True it is that Blessed Thérèse wrote that *to surrender oneself as a victim to Love is to offer oneself to every anguish, to every bitterness, for Love lives on sacrifice; and the more a soul wills to be surrendered to Love, the more must she be surrendered to suffering.*

But those words, spoken in a particular case for the consolation of a person sorely tried, were not what Blessed Thérèse habitually taught to the souls whom she wished to induce to make this Act of Oblation. She insisted on just the contrary with them, in order to convince them that they had naught to fear and all to gain, assuring them that the direct result of this donation is to draw down, not crosses, but abundant mercies.

Without doubt God is Master, and the Cross being one of His most precious treasures, He usually gives it abundantly to His beloved ones. But that is so whatsoever be the spiritual way followed. And the great advantage here is that the cross, by becoming the fruit of Love, becomes, like it, gentle and sweet. In that sense we may say that what results from the Act of Oblation is not always more suffering, but more strength and facility to bear joyfully the measure of suffering intended for us by the good God.

Here is what happens in practice.

Once a soul has consecrated herself as a victim to

merciful Love, she ought to believe, for it is true, that everything Providence sends her in answer to her oblation is the work of Love—that is to say, determined, willed, chosen by Love. Consequently, the good pleasure of God should appear to her all impregnated and radiant with Love, and she must surrender herself to it as she did to Love itself—filially, lovingly, and also with confidence, her eyes closed, without seeking to penetrate the secrets that her Father in Heaven wishes to keep hidden from her. Let her only consider it as certain that He in His infinite wisdom and goodness will never require of her sacrifices above her strength. Love will know how to be forbearing in its demands and will ever proportion them to the treasures of energy that its own grace shall have developed in her.

But still, if God has in regard to that soul more lofty designs of perfection, if especially He intends to associate her efficaciously with His work of Redemption for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of other souls, there is reason to believe that He will lead her on by slow degrees to greater sufferings. But He will know how to do so with a sweetness at once strong and gentle. He will make her experience the austere and profound joy of suffering for Love's sake, and in that way He will inspire a longing for suffering. This longing can even become so ardent that only great and continual sufferings will be capable of satisfying it. We see this clearly in the case of Blessed Thérèse. In proportion as Jesus sent her crosses, her thirst for suffering increased. But then, in the end she had gone so

far, she said, as to suffer no longer, so sweet was suffering to her. Then there was nothing like pain for giving her joy, and suffering united to love was the only thing that appeared to her desirable in this vale of tears.

How then could she regret the consequences of her donation to Love, painful though they were? That explains why, at the height of an agony without consolation, when the chalice was full to the brim and the pains so great that the dying child acknowledged that never had she believed it possible to suffer so much, she said also, and repeated several times, that she did not repent of having surrendered herself to Love.

So shall it be for all souls whom God will lead through Love to the Cross. Not one of them shall ever repent of having surrendered herself to Love, whatsoever trials may result from it.

The Principal Effects of the Act of Oblation.

The designs of Providence, however, are not the same for all the little victims of merciful Love, and there are some amongst them who shall neither know those great trials nor those great desires of suffering. They shall be none the less true victims of holocaust, most pleasing to God, for, according to the judgement of Blessed Thérèse, it is not these desires which delight the Heart of our Lord. What most pleases Him in a soul is to see her love her littleness; it is the blind trust she has in His goodness. Love of suffering is merely an accidental effect of the martyrdom of Love.

Its essential and by far most desirable result is to make the soul live in the constant exercise of Charity, or, as Blessed Thérèse says: *in one act of perfect Love.*

Now when Love takes possession of a soul to this extent, it becomes master of all her powers and animates all her works. Consequently, every action she does, even the most indifferent, bears the divine imprint of Love, and its value becomes immense in the sight of God.

That is not all. Divine Love cannot tolerate the presence nor even the trace of sin in the soul that is wholly surrendered to It. Doubtless the offering to merciful Love does not render one impeccable; it does not prevent every fall. A little victim may still be guilty of infidelities. But Love which penetrates her and surrounds her *renews her, so to speak, each moment, and ceases not to consume her, destroying in her all that could displease Jesus.*

According to that, we can foresee what will be the death of a victim of merciful Love who shall have been to the last faithful to his oblation: an enviable death, if ever there was one; and experience proves that such has always been the case. As for the Judgement that is to follow this happy death, Blessed Thérèse in her trustful simplicity believed that it would be as if there were none, so eagerly would the good God hasten to recompense with eternal delights His own Love, which He would see burn in this soul.

Still, it would be rash to think that it suffices to have pronounced the formula of the Act of Oblation in order to escape all condemnation and so to avoid

Purgatory. Blessed Thérèse has been careful to say that words alone are not sufficient. *The soul must surrender herself really and entirely. For she is consumed by Love only in so far as she surrenders herself to Love.*

The soul must have lived, too, in accordance with the holy exigencies of Love and in the exercise of charity, uniting love of her neighbour to love of God. Thus we can once more admire with what wise discretion Sister Thérèse knew how to remain ever within the exact bounds of truth and keep herself free from all exaggeration, even at the very height of her confidence.

All the foregoing remarks enable us to judge of the excellence of the effects of the oblation to the merciful Love of the good God.

Let us say, in concluding this important subject, that it is not a favour reserved merely to a few privileged souls. A very great number are called to profit by it. Such at least were the thought and the desires of "little Thérèse," and the closing lines of the story of her life show us that such was also on earth what it still must be in Heaven, the object of her ardent prayer: *I entreat Thee, O Jesus, to let Thy Divine gaze rest upon a vast number of little souls; I entreat Thee to choose in this world a Legion of little victims worthy of Thy Love!*

Why should not each one who shall read those lines, if he feel interiorly the call of grace inviting him, repeat after her and with her: *Grant, O Jesus, that I may be that happy victim!*

CHAPTER VII

Holy Abandonment

In order to raise herself to the highest summit of Love, which is the consummation of the little way of childhood, the soul has now taken her place in the Divine lift. She has put herself into the arms of her Heavenly Father, and there, given up completely to His action, which is of infinite power, she expects from Him alone her entire transformation into Love.

This transformation is not within the power of any creature. There is no one, as we have said, but God alone who can bring it about; and this *He* can do in an instant, for in His sight a thousand years are but as one day. Moreover, for that, He has no need of any thing or of any person, except a good will, which insures correspondence to grace.

In fact, there is but one thing which can place an obstacle to His power in a soul and nullify His action; and that thing is a bad will, wherever it exists. Now, the human will easily turns to evil, and by doing so becomes bad. And that is the reason why it is of such great import in the spiritual life to get rid of our own will, so as to have no other will but that of God Himself.

Blessed Thérèse understood this very early in life, and from the moment that perfection appeared to her for the first time in its reality and with all its exigencies, she exclaimed: *My God, one thing only*

do I fear, and that is to retain my own will. Take Thou my will, for I choose all that Thou willest.[1]

To give thus to God our own will so as to have none other but His all-holy Will; to surrender ourselves wholly and blindly to this infinitely lovable Will, with as much joy as those who live a natural life experience in following always their own caprice; with the same transport of love and confidence that makes a child throw himself into the arms of His father, to throw ourselves into the arms of the good God, and from there to look always upon this holy Will of God as best and sweetest and most lovable—that is the practice of this holy abandonment, of which it remains for us to speak, so as to make known one of the most characteristic features of the holiness of Blessed Thérèse, and one of the most indispensable virtues of spiritual childhood.

For if abandonment be necessary for every soul that aspires to sanctification whatever way be followed, its rôle is of essential importance here, in "the little way." It is extremely important that we should understand it, and that we should tend by constant practice to the perfection of this sublime virtue which is, together with love, the virtue *par excellence* of little children.

I. The Rôle of Holy Abandonment in the Little Way

We may say of holy abandonment as well as of merciful Love that it is the product at once of all the virtues and of all the weaknesses of the child. It is,

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. i.

in the "little way," like a cross-roads where all ways meet.

Littleness leads to it, because the little one feels the need of allowing himself to be carried.

Weakness runs to it, hoping to find there its surest support. Poverty hastens to come and seek in it its ever-assured sustenance.

Confidence, too, tends to it with all its force, because he who trusts instinctively surrenders himself, and great confidence leads to entire abandonment of self into the hands of the Friend or Father.

Above all, abandonment is the end and the outcome of love. To love is to give. But the most perfect manner of giving ourselves, is it not by surrendering self? Abandonment includes the whole gift, together with something more absolute at the heart of it, and something more touching in form of it, which renders it at once more complete and more delicate.

It is exactly in that way that Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus understood it. She conceived abandonment as acting especially through Love; which in her case worked in two ways, for holy abandonment appeared to her at once the best means of expressing her love for the good God, and the most efficacious means of raising herself rapidly to the perfection of Divine Love. So she abandoned herself because she loved; and she abandoned herself in order to love still more.

1. *How Abandonment leads to the Perfection of Holy Love.*

Jesus, the Divine Master of pure hearts, had been pleased *early to instruct His little victim, and He had shown her that the only road which leads to the Divine furnace of Love is the abandonment of the little child who sleeps without fear in the father's arms.*

Bound for a far distant goal, the object of his ardent desires, what in fact can a child do, who is incapable not only of advancing, but even of discovering the route? All alone in his little barque, lost amidst the waves, in the immensity of a sea interspersed with reefs and fruitful in shipwrecks, where very many of those who commenced the voyage before him have already foundered without having reached *the luminous Beacon of Love*, the little one whom Jesus enlightens with His Divine light understands that so many sad shipwrecks are due solely to the imprudence of those who wanted to guide their barque for themselves, without knowing their way. And looking towards his Father in Heaven, who holds in His hand the winds and the sun, who commands the tempests and whom the waves obey, and seeing himself the constant object of His most loving attention, he says to himself in his simplicity that, *in order to guide his barque, the one thing proper for a little child is to abandon himself, to let his sail be filled at the mercy of the wind.*[1] In reality, nothing could be more wise. For what

[1] Lettre à sa sœur Céline.

else is the mercy of the wind but the breath of God moving over the world? The spirit breatheth where He will, and the spirit of God is Love. In allowing himself to be borne along by the wind, it is to Love itself, to a Love which is infinite in wisdom and in goodness as well as in power, that the child has entrusted himself. Happy child!

God alone, in truth, knows the way that each soul should follow here below. There is nothing more admirable than the variety of the ways by which He leads His elect. But one thing remains invariable, that is the particular love with which He directs, governs and protects the soul which, entrusting herself to Him without reserve, leaves Him completely free to lead her on according to His wisdom. At every instant, both outwardly by the course of events and inwardly by the promptings of His grace, He procures for her what is most useful and best for her just at the moment. And so the soul which is most completely given up to abandonment is always the most tenderly fondled, the most powerfully succoured, the most constantly laden with the favours of Divine Goodness.

For this reason, there is nothing so sanctifying as abandonment well understood. It is the shortest and safest, and at the same time the pleasantest road by which to arrive at the perfection of Love. And it is on this road that "little Thérèse" has traced her *little way*, which, she said, is none other than *that of confidence and complete abandonment*.

2. *How Abandonment allows the Child to manifest his Love.*

The heart of our Beata bore her instinctively towards this complete abandonment. For she saw in it, not only the road that leads to the perfection of love, but also the most delicate manifestation of her child-like love.

In her sight, before all and above all, God was the Father *par excellence*, more tender than all fathers and more maternal than a mother. She took delight in singing to Him:

O Thou who didst create the mother's heart,
Tenderest of fathers to me Thou art;
My sole Love, Jesus, O Word Eternal!
For me Thy Heart is more than maternal.

She saw Him always occupied with His child:

Thou dost follow and shield me the live-long day,
When I call, Thou hastest, ne'er a delay.

Even playing with His little one, as earthly fathers do with theirs:

And when on a time Thou dost hide Thy Face,
'Tis Thyself dost show me Thy hiding-place.[1]

What her abandonment of herself into the arms of this tender Father was, and how she made of it her Heaven on earth, is revealed to us in one of her poems which helps us to penetrate to the very depths of her beautiful childlike soul. Several of those verses deserve to be pondered over at length so as to extract from them their penetrating sweetness and their delightful lessons. But we should fear to rob

[1] "Jésus seul."

them of their freshness by trying to explain them. In order to grasp their meaning it is better that each one should dwell upon them in quiet beneath the gaze of the good God Himself, by the light of His grace, in the divine intimacy of prayer:

My Heaven is—to feel in me the likeness
Of the God of power who created me;
My Heaven is—to stay for ever in His presence,
To call Him Father—just His child to be;
Safe in His Arms divine, near to His sacred Face,
Resting upon His Heart, of the storm I have no fear;
Abandonment complete, this is my only law—
Behold my Heaven here![1]

Now, the child who abandons himself in the arms of a tenderly loved father or mother does not usually calculate the import of his action. He abandons himself, as he loves, instinctively. This is exactly what "little Thérèse" did. Or, if she reasoned about her act of abandonment, if she sought advantages in it, they were not so much her own as those of Jesus.

What she saw in it above all was a means of proving her love to Him in a very perfect manner, by rendering herself completely dependent on Him and on His holy will, *in order the better to give Him pleasure.*

The will of the good God! Blessed Thérèse did so love it! Like Jesus Himself, she made it the whole nourishment of her soul. She lived on it and concentrated on this holy will all her desires and all the ardour of her prayer, not knowing how *to desire anything ardently* except the perfect fulfilment of the will of God in her soul.[2]

[1] "Mon Ciel à moi."
[2] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. viii.

It was in order to accomplish it perfectly that she made herself obedient to the least prescriptions of the Rule and of the Superiors. And even more, *she gazed unceasingly into the eyes of the good God*—the expression is her own—*in order to read in them what pleased Him most and to accomplish it immediately.*[1]

Now, there is something more perfect than to accomplish ourselves the good pleasure of God by doing what pleases Him: it is to leave Him free to please Himself in us, by directing everything in our life according to His own free will, without taking anything else into consideration except the interests of His glory and the greater joy of His Heart. It is to measure our own happiness, not according to the good fortune or profit that events bring to us, but according to the opportunities they offer us of procuring the Divine good pleasure. To know that the good God was satisfied was sufficient happiness for "little Thérèse," and filled her with joy.

And so the purest disinterestedness appears to us to be the distinctive mark of her abandonment. This it is that is most prominent in her words, as also in the comparisons she employs to explain her thought. In truth she desires but one thing: that is, to be in the hands of the Child Jesus as a little toy, but *a toy of no value, that He can throw on the ground, toss about, pierce, leave in a corner, or else press to His Heart, if it so please Him. For she desires no other joy but that of making Him smile.* Or again, what she wishes to be is a rose that sheds its petals beneath the Feet of Jesus, one that is treated without care,

[1] Souvenirs inédits.

forgotten, thrown at the mercy of the wind. He may trample it underfoot, He may crush it; that does not matter, provided only it soothe at least His last steps on Calvary!

It goes without saying that preferences of a personal nature would be incompatible with such a degree of abandonment. And so Blessed Thérèse, in what concerned herself, made it a rule not to be occupied with any particular desires. Indifferent to life or death, although her heart told her that death was the more enviable portion, she abstained from choosing. She left that care to her Father in Heaven. *What He chooses for me*, she said, *is what pleases me most. I love all that He does.*

It happens sometimes—too often—that we go very far in search of perfection, whereas we have it continually within our reach. After all, holiness is nothing else practically than the union of conformity between man's will and God's will. The more perfect this conformity is—that is to say, the more real it is, and based on love—the more it unites the creature to the Creator, so that to become a saint it would suffice to practise perfectly holy abandonment; for in its perfect degree this abandonment supposes the soul to be altogether absorbed and completely transformed into the will of God.

From this we can judge of the value of the little way and of its efficaciousness in the sanctification of souls, since it is nothing else but a life that is all love united with complete abandonment.

II.—The Prudence of Blessed Thérèse in the Exercise of Holy Abandonment

Blessed Thérèse knew how to exercise always discretion and prudence in her "little way." For more dangers than one are encountered therein, and it is necessary to be watchful against excesses which are always possible.

It is thus that she showed herself circumspect in face of certain high aspirations, familiar to generous souls, which at first sight seem to come from the Spirit of God, but which are often nothing more than idle fancies inspired by self-love. We know of her great desires of immolation and her thirst for suffering. Nevertheless, feeling herself ever little and weak, even in the arms of the good God, she took care never to desire or to ask for greater sufferings than those which her Father in Heaven destined for her: *I would be afraid of being presumptuous*, she avowed, *and that those sufferings, having become then my own sufferings, I would be obliged to bear them alone; never have I been able to do anything alone.* And her abandonment never deviated from that characteristic of perfect simplicity which so well becomes the little child.

With the same prudence she closed her eyes to the future, and she encouraged little souls to do likewise. *We who run in the way of Love must never torment ourselves about anything.*[1] And through prudence as well as through Love, her abandonment made

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

itself voluntarily blind, so as to leave more completely to her Heavenly Father the care of watching and of providing for her every need.

Yet there was not in that any of the timidity or apathy of a soul that gives herself up to carelessness through weakness and lack of energy. On the contrary, her confidence enabled her to find in abandonment an admirable courage. A prey to sickness, she wrote: *I have no fear of the last combats, nor of the sufferings of my malady, how great soever they may be. The good God has aided me and led me by the hand from my tenderest infancy; I rely on Him. I am sure that He will continue to help me to the last. I may have to suffer extremely, but I shall never have too much, I am sure.*[1]

And her heroic patience, which never failed her even to her last breath, proved that she spoke truth.

On the other hand, her abandonment had nothing of rashness in it. The same prudence which guarded her against discouragement preserved her likewise from presumption. This prudent virgin who *expected everything from the good God* knew that we must not tempt His Providence, and that, while relying on His grace, we must also turn it to use and second it. Being charged, notwithstanding her youth, with the instruction of the novices, she redoubled her abandonment. She placed herself like a little child in the arms of her Father, and there, with her eyes fixed on Him, she waited till He Himself should fill her hand that she might give, as she said, food to her children. And without even turning

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

her head aside, she distributed to them what came to her from God alone. But this union in no way lessened her vigilance, or her clearness of judgement, nor did it make her retrench in any way the duties which Christian prudence imposes. She watched, observed, and studied souls, knowing well that they must not all be taken in the same way. And so *from her elevated post nothing escaped her gaze.* She watched very exactly over all the duties of her office.

We have cited this example in order to show that abandonment, rightly understood, far from stifling the other virtues, rather develops them. And just as it does not annihilate prudence, so it does not lessen generosity. Listen to this song of a soul entirely surrendered to holy abandonment:

Thee alone, Jesus—Thee, and none beside,
'Tis to Thine Arms that I run to hide;
As a little child would I fain love Thee,
As a warrior, strive for victory.
Of a child the delicate, tender love
My caresses, Lord, to Thee shall prove;
And in the field of my apostolate
My zeal in the fight shall ne'er abate.[1]

Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus is there whole and entire, humble and trustful, weak and ardent, entirely surrendered to Abandonment and to Love. . . . And in this union of love and valour, of calm abandonment and of courageous action, consists the whole ideal of the little souls destined to become the victims of merciful Love. Who would not aspire to its realization, so beautiful is it?

[1] "Jésus seul."

CHAPTER VIII

Zeal

When a fire breaks out in the interior of a house, it consumes rapidly everything within its reach, and, as its heat increases with all it consumes, the space where it is enclosed becomes too confined to contain it. Then through the windows, the glass of which crashes, through the roof which falls in, through the breaches made in the collapsing walls, the flames are seen bursting forth and darting towards the neighbouring houses in order to devour them in their turn. And so it happens at times that a mere spark produces an immense conflagration.

In the same way, when Divine Love is enkindled in a heart, it is at first only a spark of fire under the embers. Little by little it grows hotter, it flames, it becomes a glowing hearth, so much so that after some time, it also being too much confined, seeks to extend itself; it bursts forth. At first there are only feeble sparks, and then veritable flames. These sparks and these flames of Love constitute zeal, because zeal is to love what flame is to fire: the proof of its ardour.

We can affirm then that Blessed Thérèse must have been devoured by zeal since she was consumed by love. Such in truth was the case. An eminently apostolic soul and a true daughter of St. Teresa, she showed herself to have an extreme ardour for the salvation and sanctification of souls, giving in this as in all else an admirable example to the little victims

of Merciful Love, whom it is her mission to draw after her. Let these then not believe that they have arrived at the end of the "little way" so long as zeal is not enkindled, like a flame, in their hearts.

For it is impossible to love the good God sincerely, much less to love Him ardently, without desiring that He be known, loved and glorified by all men; without suffering at seeing His Name outraged, His Love despised, and the sufferings of Jesus Christ rendered fruitless for so many sinners.

In the same way we cannot truly love our neighbour without feeling a lively sorrow at the sight of the unfortunate ones who daily fall into Hell, because their misery makes us shudder when we realize it. And those on earth who habitually live in danger of imminent damnation are legion.

But whether it is a question of God or of our neighbour, sentiments though generous do not suffice: love is proved by works, and the special work of love here is zeal.

We insist on this point. The *little way* is a way wholly of love, which tends only to love, and derives all its value from love. It is then of the utmost importance that the souls that enter upon it should remove from themselves everything that might be an obstacle to Divine Charity. Now this latter has no greater enemy than egotism, which, shut up within itself, thinks but of self, of its own pleasure and of its own interests. There is a false piety, the piety consisting merely in appearances, of those whom the Apostle speaks of, who seek their own

advantage and not the interests of Jesus Christ,[1] a piety based on egotism.

When this egotism takes root in a soul, it wounds love and corrupts it even as the worm taints the fruit into which it has entered. Disastrous for every soul, egotism would be mortal for the virtue of a little victim of Merciful Love. She must preserve herself carefully from it, or, if she is seized with it, let her get rid of it at all cost. There is no more efficacious means for so doing than the exercise of zeal which makes us go out of ourselves and forget ourselves for the service of souls.

Thus zeal shows itself to be at once the safeguard and the fruit of holy love.

It is truly providential that the first of the little victims of Love, she who was to trace out the way for the others and serve as their model, was such a zealous soul. Let us see then from what source she drew her zeal and in what way she exercised it. From this double point of view, her way is wholly characteristic, and *little souls* will derive immense profit by imitating her.

I.—The Source of Zeal

We may say that the zeal of Blessed Thérèse was born with her and grew with her growth.

Divine love had, she said, gone before her from her infancy, and that is why, while yet a child, she loved souls, desired their salvation, and, in order to procure it, had recourse to the most ingenious

[1] *Cf.* Phil. ii 21.

practices which her naïve piety suggested to her. From the age of three years, her little daily acts of renunciation and her sacrifices could be counted by hundreds.

But it was when approaching her thirteenth year that she received the great grace of her apostolate. She has related it at length in the story of her life.

It was Sunday, at the end of Mass. As she was closing her book, a picture, representing our Lord on the Cross, slips partly out of the pages, just far enough to let her see one of the Divine Hands, pierced and bleeding.

It is only a minute detail. A hundred times before, perhaps, she has looked upon that same Hand without being impressed by it. But on that day a strong penetrating grace descends upon her and moves her soul to its very depths.

My heart, she writes, *was torn with grief at the sight of the Precious Blood falling to the ground with no one eager to gather it as it fell; and I resolved to remain in spirit continually at the foot of the Cross that I might receive the Divine Dew of salvation and pour it forth on souls. From that day the cry of the dying Saviour, "I thirst!" re-echoed continually in my heart, firing it with an ardent zeal till then unknown to me. I longed to give to my Beloved to drink; I too felt myself consumed with the thirst for souls, and at all cost I would wrest sinners from the eternal flames.*[1]

As we see, it is from the love of Jesus Crucified that the zeal of our Beata springs. What inclines her to

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. v.

sinners is less the thought of their misery than the sight of *His* sorrow.

Doubtless her compassionate heart, animated by an ardent charity, could not remain insensible to the misery of those souls that are damned. But what she sees above all in sinners is that they are wretched ingrates who offend the good God, who do not love Him, and who, if they should be damned, will hate Him for all eternity, and so render fruitless the Blood and the sufferings of the Saviour of the world. What afflicts her most is the thought that from their hearts there no longer rises and perhaps never will rise an act of love for the God who has so loved them. Then her whole *raison d'être* and her whole life appear to her in a new light, which she conveys in those expressive words: *There is only one thing to do here below: to love Jesus and to save souls for Him that He may be loved.*

Let us consider well these words: *To love Jesus and to save souls* FOR HIM *that He may be loved.* Here is a zeal which not only comes from love, but tends to and returns wholly to Love: *Let us save souls* FOR HIM *that so He may be loved!*

We made a similar remark already in regard to the other virtues of Blessed Thérèse. But here it is particularly striking.

We know now the source of her zeal. From this it is easy to deduce its most salient characteristics.

Born of the love of Jesus, her zeal is pure as her love. No smoke is mingled with the bright glow of its flame.

From such a burning hearth, immense waves

of heat must indeed come forth. For the love of Jesus is noble, says the author of the "Imitation," it spurs us on to do great things: it is earnest and does not want to lose any opportunity of manifesting itself by works.

But let us hear "little Thérèse": *We have but the single day of this life to save souls and thus to give Jesus proofs of our love. . . . Let us be jealous of the smallest opportunities of giving Him joy: let us refuse Him nothing. He does so want our love!* In order to turn the one day of this present life to the best advantage, to save a greater number of souls and to gain over to Jesus a greater number of hearts, she would wish to multiply her labours and her sufferings, to hold simultaneously the most sacred offices, to have every possible vocation. She would wish to be a priest so as to give God to souls, a doctor so as to enlighten them, a missionary so as to travel all over the world and announce the Gospel everywhere, and all that not for a few years only but till the end of time.

For this is another characteristic of her zeal: the immensity, or say rather the universality, of her desires. One might say that, like St. Paul, she bears with her the solicitude of all the churches. She bears still more: for she holds enclosed within her heart all the desires of the Heart of Jesus, not only those which concern the present time, but also those which regard the far distant future. She counts on doing good till the Last Day.

A chimerical dream! So it would appear. An unrealizable ambition. For, judging according to

the usual course of things, how many souls will she be able to reach from the seclusion of her Carmel, during the very short time of her existence? But her zeal replies that all is possible to love, and that a great confidence triumphs over all things. That is why she hopes, and is certain that her immense desires will be accomplished.

We know that prophecy of hers which events have so magnificently realized even to this day. It was a few days before her happy death, when she said: *I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make others love the good God as I love Him . . . to give to souls my little way. I* WILL SPEND MY HEAVEN IN DOING GOOD UPON EARTH. *This is not impossible, since from the very heart of the Beatific Vision the angels keep watch over us. No, there can be no rest for me till the end of the world! But when the Angel shall have said: " Time is no more!" then shall I rest—shall be able to rejoice, because the number of the elect will be complete.*

This incredible zeal which enlarges her horizon and extends her hopes even to infinity is the natural outcome of the way of spiritual childhood. For none but a "little one" would have the daring to carry his confidence to such extremes. It is only the child of a God who can give himself up to desires "greater than the universe" and hope that these desires will be not only fulfilled but far surpassed. To conceive such immense desires is the function of confidence, but it is for love alone to realize them. Blessed Thérèse will teach it to us.

II.—The Exercise of Zeal

There are, besides the preaching of the word of God reserved to priests, two principal means of apostolate which are at the disposal of every soul of good will: prayer and sacrifice. Blessed Thérèse did not fail to employ both the one and the other.

She knew the great efficacy of prayer. She saw in prayer the mysterious and irresistible lever which has served the saints of every age to uplift the world. In her confident simplicity she even believed that often *the Creator of the Universe awaits only the prayer of one poor little soul to save a multitude of others, redeemed like her at the price of His Blood.* And so her prayer, though usually dry, was continual. We know one of her modes of prayer on behalf of sinners. It consisted, as we have seen, in remaining at the foot of the Cross, receiving the Blood as it flows from the wounds of the Crucified, to offer it to God in expiation, and to pour it on souls as a purifying dew.

She had recourse to sacrifice as much as to prayer. Sacrifice is indeed the very basis of the Redemption, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.[1] The saints of every age understood this, and there has been no apostolic man, or converter of souls, who was not a man of sacrifice and penance.

Nor was Blessed Thérèse ignorant of this. She knew that *since the King of Heaven raised up the standard of the Cross, it is under its shadow that all*

[1] Heb. ix 22.

must fight and win the victory. For together with the love of souls Jesus had put into her heart the love of sacrifice. This good Master, having made her understand that it was through the Cross He would give her souls, *the more crosses she encountered, the stronger became her attraction to suffering.* We know how far she went in her passionate love of sacrifice, and that she was an immolated soul.

Yet that is not the distinctive characteristic of her apostolate. Blessed Thérèse was an apostle above all by love. Other saints have been, like her, souls of prayer, and some have gone further than she in the practice of penance. She wished to triumph above all by love. Love was her chosen weapon. She could not have said it more clearly: "With the sword of love I will drive the stranger from the kingdom. I will have Jesus proclaimed King in all hearts." A strange sword, truly! Weapon of peace, if ever there was one, but an irresistible weapon which draws all its force from its sweetness, which conquers Jesus by caresses, and, making Him smile, disarms Him.

When I wrestle with Thee, the sinner to save,
My weapon of choice—strewing flowers at Thy Feet,
I disarm Thee, Lord, like warrior brave,
With flowerets sweet!

One word especially is significant. Love triumphs over Jesus *by disarming Him*—that is to say, by making the arms with which His justice would strike sinners fall from His hands.

There is another means of saving them, which consists in offering oneself to receive the blows which they have but too well merited; and it is thus, as we

have seen, that those generous souls act who offer themselves as victims to Divine Justice. But little victims have the resource which is theirs from their title of *child*. They win Jesus by love, our Beata said; by caresses. They begin by making Him smile, and they fascinate Him by strewing flowers before Him, and once they have made themselves sovereigns of His Heart they have no difficulty in wresting His arms from Him. Love gives to them in His eyes the empire of a queen over the heart of her king. And so it comes to pass that sweetness accomplishes what strength could not have done, and love triumphs where expiation alone would have been powerless.

This is how the "little queen" obtains now from the King of kings pardon for the greatest culprits. How else can we explain the innumerable graces of conversion and of salvation attributed to the power of her intercession? Neither her penances, considered in themselves, nor even her prayers, seem capable of giving a satisfactory explanation. It is love alone that suffices to explain everything. "Little Thérèse" has possessed herself of the Heart of the good God by force of love, and now God can refuse her nothing: *I have never given anything but love to Him*, she was able to say; *with love He will repay me.* And again: *I have won Him by caresses, and that is why I shall be so well received.*

This would be the place in which to recall how the humble child conquered the Heart of her Heavenly Father at the price of a love which was tender, refined, earnest, generous, ardent, and filial—above all,

filial. For everything in her life, as also in her spirituality, is held together and connected in wonderful harmony. And one cannot understand what is said here of her zeal in particular, without having first realized the depth and the tenderness of her love of God, or rather her life, which was all love, which draws love from everything and transforms everything into love—pains and sacrifices and even joys. Nor must we lose sight of these words which throw such a shining light on her life here below and on her mission in Heaven: *In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be love. . . . My brothers toil in my place, and I, the little child, I keep quite close to the royal throne; I love for those who fight.*

The same place and the same weapons are offered to all little victims of the Merciful Love of God, and great triumphs await them also if, by uniting prayer to sacrifice, they cease not to immolate themselves, and above all to love; if, like Blessed Thérèse, and side by side with her, they also *become Love* in the heart of the Church their Mother and spend their lives doing the works of Love.

CHAPTER IX

Simplicity

SIMPLICITY gives to childhood one of its most fascinating characteristics. Simplicity it is that impresses on the slightest movements of the little one, on its every word, on all its ways, that stamp of uprightness and candour which renders it so lovable in our eyes. To take away its simplicity from the child would be to take from the flower its perfume.

So entrancing a virtue could not be wanting to the little child of the good God. And for this reason the soul that wishes to advance on the way of spiritual childhood ought to value simplicity very highly. She must banish from her mind, from her heart, and from her conduct, all that savours of duplicity, and even all that appears in the slightest degree complex, and practise to the very letter on every occasion the counsel of Jesus to His Apostles: " Be ye simple as doves."

Blessed Thérèse was a perfect model of this beautiful and lovable simplicity, and were we to say nothing of it, the sketch of her soul we give here, as well as the idea we ought to form for ourselves about her little way, would be altogether incomplete.

Besides, this virtue is not one of those of which the acts are made only from time to time as opportunities occur; its practice is a thing of every day and, in some manner, of every moment. Or, to speak more correctly, it consists less in distinct acts than in a certain manner of being which is impressed on one's whole life, not only in external conduct, but even in

the thoughts and the most interior sentiments of the soul. And that is what gives it such great importance.

In the spirituality of Blessed Thérèse, or like her, to speak more simply, as in her "little doctrine," everything is ordinary, everything happens in the very simplest way: the soul is borne towards God as the river is borne towards the sea; the river following the incline flows downwards, the soul following its inclination tends upwards. And as the river flows on, shut in between its banks, without seeking a way for itself outside, so in spiritual childhood life passes away in God by following the course of events, and borne along by the very surroundings of life, because in everything that presents itself to be done or to be suffered, a little soul always finds a means of raising itself to God by love and by the practice of every virtue.

Such was the life of "little Thérèse." Outwardly, no remarkable events; within, nothing extraordinary either: no visions, no raptures, no ecstasies; but the common way from every point of view, from the beginning to the end; the ordinary life in the obscurity of Faith.

This it is which makes of her, for a very large number of souls, a model so encouraging and so easy of imitation. For as she sang herself: *The number of little ones on earth is very great*, and *in my little way*, she says again, *there are only quite ordinary things; all that I do, little souls must be able to do also.*[1]

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

Let us follow her, then, once more in the luminous traces that she has left on her way. Nothing will be more capable of arousing our confidence and our fervour than to consider, at the close of this study, how simple was the way which raised her in so short a time to a high degree of perfection.

I.—How Simplicity Goes Straight to God

It is the property of simplicity to go straight to its end.

In the spiritual life the end is God. To go straight to God is to have Him as the direct end of all our actions, and not to harass ourselves with any other care. For that, we must forget creatures and not seek to please them; we must forget self, and in no way seek our own pleasure or personal advantage. For howsoever little a person is occupied with self or with creatures, he turns aside, he deviates from the straight line, he ceases to tend directly to God; he leaves simplicity behind.

Our Beata, as we have seen, had but one constant preoccupation: to please the good God. That is how she brought unity into her life, and it was an excellent way of being simple, for here unity and simplicity are all one.

But God is love. Hence, to go to Him she considered that there is no better means than love. And to the simplicity of the end she joined the simplicity of the means. For in her eyes all were reduced to love. Still, that did not prevent her from having recourse to the practice of the other virtues. But she

so enveloped and permeated them with love that she transformed them all into love, and she could say: *I know of one means only by which to arrive at perfection: Love. Let us love, since our heart is made for nothing else.*

Thus, simplicity in the end: God alone; simplicity in the means: love; and this love again freed from everything that might complicate it and reduced to its simplest form: the love of a child for his father. Such is, as we remember, the foundation of the spirituality of Blessed Thérèse.

Now simplicity of love brings with it simplicity of faith. For the child who loves never doubts the word of his father. If the virtue of Faith, considered in its human element, is founded on the intellect and the will, the heart can also have a part in it, and, when it intervenes, it simplifies and strengthens to a remarkable degree the acquiescence of these two powers. "As for us," says St John, "we believe in love." But this word which solves every difficulty in the presence of the obscurities of Faith, what else is it but a cry of loving confidence to the father or to the friend that speaks to us? Such was the faith of Blessed Thérèse, not only in the bright days when her soul gently expanded beneath the warm rays of the Divine Sun, but also in the most gloomy days of her great temptations against Faith. She never ceased to believe, because she never ceased to love Him in whom faith told her to believe.

The same love which rendered her faith so simple, made her confidence also very simple. She trusted as she believed, because she loved, and in the full

measure of her love. And from thence, too, came the wonderful simplicity of her abandonment.

Thence, in fine, the relations so affectionate and simple which in all ways she maintained with her Father in Heaven, notably in her prayer. Her manner of prayer had nothing in it complicated or strained. *I have not the courage*, she said herself, *to force myself to seek beautiful prayers in books; not knowing which to choose, I act as children do who cannot read: I say quite simply to the good God what I want to tell Him, and he always understands me.*[1]

Nothing could be more touching, because nothing more beautiful in its simplicity, than the following scene which belongs to nearly the last hours of her life. It was the night but one before her death. Her infirmarian, on entering the infirmary, found her with her hands joined and her eyes raised towards Heaven.

"But what are you doing?" she asked; "you should try to sleep."

"I cannot, dear Sister; I suffer too much! Then I pray . . ."

"And what do you say to Jesus?"

"*I say nothing:* I LOVE HIM."[2]

Simple with God, she is simple even in the very distractions that assail her. Others would be troubled about them; she is content *to accept all that for the love of the good God, even the most extravagant thoughts that come into her mind.*

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. x.
[2] *Ibid.*, chap. xii.

Further still, she is simple in her manner of recommending to God those dear to her. If she had to enumerate the needs of each one in particular, she said, the days would be too short for doing so, and she would greatly fear forgetting something important. Besides, complicated methods are not for simple souls, and as she is one of these, Jesus Himself inspired her with a very simple means. It consists in saying to Him with the Spouse in the Canticles: "Draw me: we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments," for a soul could not run alone without drawing after her the souls whom she loves. This is a natural consequence of her attraction towards God.

In this way nothing can distract a soul whose one occupation is to love; nothing can turn it away from its end. On the contrary, everything that might seem capable of turning it aside, such as the most importunate distractions and preoccupations of every kind, becomes new material for her love. Just as we see rivers, swollen by the waters which their tributaries bring, drawing along with themselves these waters without being delayed by them; and all that comes to them from left and right, from far and near, instead of slackening their course only accelerates it. And when at last all these waters reach the sea, they have no longer any name but one, that of the river which bears them along.

In the same way the beauty of a life is evolved from its simplicity. When it is vowed wholly to love, this latter draws everything along in its train, and nothing resists it. Thoughts, works, pains, joys, preoccupa-

tions, everything is subject to the attraction of love. And just as the streams lose their names when mingled with the river, so at the contact of love everything in life becomes love and is transformed into love. It is the triumph of charity and the blessed fruit of simplicity.

II.—Where and How Simplicity is to be Learned

Blessed Thérèse has just told us: complicated methods are not for simple souls. So, in order to learn the great science of perfection, the most simple doctrine is that which suits them best, which they appreciate the more and from which they derive the most profit. That is the reason why Blessed Thérèse so loved the Gospels.

When I read, she says, *certain treatises where perfection is set forth as encompassed by a thousand obstacles, my poor little head grows weary very quickly. I close the learned book which puzzles my brains and dries up my heart, and in its stead I open the Holy Scriptures. Then all appears clear, luminous. One single word discloses to my soul infinite horizons; perfection seems easy; I see that it is sufficient to recognize our nothingness and to leave oneself like a child in the arms of the good God. Let great souls and sublime intellects enjoy the beautiful books, which I cannot understand, still less put in practice. I rejoice in being little, since children only will be admitted to the Heavenly banquet. It is well that the Kingdom of Heaven contains many mansions, for if there were none other than those of which*

the description and the way seem incomprehensible to me, I should never be able to enter therein.[1]

We would be certainly wrong in concluding from those lines that Blessed Thérèse professed the least contempt for treatises on spirituality in which the Saints or other authors have accumulated the treasures of their experience or the fruit of their knowledge. We know from the story of her life that, while still quite young, she knew by heart nearly all the "Imitation of Christ," that during the first years of her religious life she learned in the school of St. John of the Cross, that she meditated with profit on the "Foundations of the Spiritual Life," by P. Surin, etc.

But in proportion as she advanced in years, her soul was becoming more and more simplified. Very soon after her entrance into Carmel, an aged nun of her convent had told her that it would be so. "Your soul is extremely simple," she said to her, "but when perfect you will become still more simple; the nearer we approach to God the simpler we become." Now according as she became more simple, instead of going to draw water from the channels which bring to the earth the living waters of truth, she felt herself instinctively urged to go direct to the fountain-head. The fountain-head is the inspired word, the word of God Himself; it is the Holy Scripture, and especially the Gospels, a book twice divine, being inspired by God and setting forth the life of the Man-God.

Of all the Sacred Books, that of the Gospels was the one she consulted most willingly and with the greatest love. It was for her more and better than a

[1] VIe lettre à des missionaires.

VADE-MECUM; night and day she bore it on her heart; she nourished her soul with it; we might say she lived on it.

She loved to contemplate in it the examples of the Divine Spouse to whom she has vowed all her affection; and by merely looking at Him, and listening to Him, she learned the science of sanctity. *Oh, how luminous are His footprints—diffusing a divine sweetness. . . . I have but to glance at the holy Gospels and immediately I inhale the fragrance of the life of Jesus, and I know which side to take.*[1]

The picture of the Holy Family at Nazareth in particular appealed very sweetly to her soul. Everything there was so simple.

In the life of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph there was nothing remarkable, nothing extraordinary. What an encouragement it was, therefore, for a little soul called to journey along the ordinary path to contemplate the august Mother of God in a life from many points of view like to her own. Our Beata must have often dwelt upon this thought. When she speaks of it we feel gratitude and joy overflowing from her heart.

In these modest surroundings of the life at Nazareth, where the days follow one another bringing with them the monotonous round of the same labours and the same duties, amidst ordinary occupations, St Joseph became a great Saint, the Blessed Virgin merited to be crowned Queen of Heaven, and Jesus found the means of saving the world. Can we, then, become holy without departing from the

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. x.

ordinary way of life, and that while doing only the most commonplace things? Yes; and it is the genius of simplicity to make us discover in the very position which we hold the providential means of sanctification which the good God offers to each one of us.

This means Blessed Thérèse for her part found in her humble life as a Carmelite. She understood that she was meant to seek the secret of perfection in her religious life itself, and, in order to weave her web of sanctity, she did not go searching at a distance, but seized the thread ready to her hand, drawing it from all her actions and from the smallest events. On this web so slight her love embroidered virtue-flowers of great richness and exquisite beauty. It is in thus making use of quite small things that she has become a great saint. In vain should we seek in her life anything extraordinary; we should not discover there anything of this nature unless it be the extraordinary perfection with which she accomplished the most ordinary deeds.

In that she has given proof of an admirably practical judgement; she has shown us a very sure way of sanctity, for there is no fear of illusion for one who bases his virtue on the perfect fulfilment of the duties of his state. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that never did anyone have a truer conception of sanctity, because no one, we believe, ever conceived it with greater simplicity.

III.—Simplicity in the Practice of Virtue

Still, one cannot become a real saint except on condition of practising all the virtues in an heroic degree. Blessed Thérèse, as we know by the official judgement of Holy Church, raised herself to this heroic degree of virtue in an ordinary manner. What we wish to draw attention to here is that even on her heroism she has left the mark of her simplicity.

To consider, for example, the practice of penance only. There are two ways therein of showing heroism. One consists in having recourse to extraordinary means, in multiplying fasts, in depriving oneself of sleep, in mortifying the body with harsh hair-cloth, and in lacerating it with long disciplines even to blood. Many of the great saints have with wonderful courage practised this severe mortification, and, because they were guided therein by the Spirit of God, received through that channel abundant graces of sanctification for themselves and of conversion for sinners.

The other heroic form of penance is to profit by all the opportunities which present themselves daily, of renouncing and of overcoming self. It is, as it were, to make mortification spring from the circumstances and all the events which Providence places in our path.

Obviously it is this second method which is more suited to children. For one would hardly imagine a very small child given up to austerities which far surpass his age and strength. Rather, one pictures him as awaiting from his Father, who provides for all

his needs, those of the soul as well as those of the body, occasions for practising virtue, not excepting that of penance. And, in fact, however little attentive he may be, he will see these opportunities occurring at almost every instant.

This is exactly the way in which Blessed Thérèse understood the matter. In order, therefore, to satisfy her need for mortification, which, nevertheless, was very great, she rarely had recourse to the extraordinary penances of her choice. On one occasion, however, she was ill through having worn too long a little iron cross, of which the points had sunk into her flesh, and she said that *this would never have resulted from so slight a cause had not the good God wished to make her understand that the macerations of the great saints were not for her, nor for the little souls who wished to walk along the same path of childhood.*[1]

In truth, in order to understand these words we must place them in the environment in which she uttered them. The Carmelite rule is severe, and we know that Blessed Thérèse observed it in all its severity for as long a time as her strength permitted. She practised then, even corporally, severe austerities which surely amounted to a number sufficient without adding more.

But a person in the world, living in abundance and lacking nothing, would be wrong to justify himself from the words of the Beata in living a slack and sensual life. A small amount of corporal penance is necessary for anyone who aspires to sanctity, as much

[1] "Hist. d'une Ame," chap. xii.

in the world as in the cloister. What Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus wished to make us understand here is, first of all, it seems to us, that for little souls interior mortification is of more value than corporal penance; and, secondly, that the best mortification does not consist in imitating the great macerations of certain saints, but in supplying their place with continuous mortification in availing ourselves instead of all opportunities which offer themselves for self-denial or of renouncing our own ease and our tastes.

This is what she applied herself constantly to do, and she was extremely ingenious in making up to herself in small things for that which she could not accomplish in great things.

For instance, not being able to imitate the almost complete fast of a St Rose of Lima, she took care to mortify her taste continually, not in seeking always the worst, but in eating with the same satisfaction what she liked and what she did not like at all, and even what disagreed with her. She would deprive herself of drinking during the whole of a meal rather than cause the slightest pain to her neighbour at table in making her notice an involuntary neglect; at other times she would drink as slowly as possible a most bitter draught, or again, one day when she had been dispensed from fasting she was surprised in the act of seasoning with absinthe some food too much to her liking.

Prevented from using at discretion some instruments of penance, by the use of which certain saints endeavoured to subdue their bodies, during whole winters she left to the cold the task of cruelly morti-

fying her own, and her suffering was so severe that more than once she thought she would die. But because Providence allowed matters to be thus she never complained, nor did she ever ask for any alleviation.

In her eyes the most useful discipline is not that which we inflict on ourselves but that which comes from a certain want of consideration or attention. Thus when in the laundry one of the sisters, without noticing what she did, splashed her with dirty water, she saw in it only an excellent opportunity for mortification, gratuitously offered by Divine Providence; and however disagreeable it might be she purposely came again and stood in the same place where, she said, she was presented with such precious treasures at so little cost.

She did not ask to do more than to observe the rule, but in all that this prescribed she obliged herself always to persevere to the utmost of her strength rather than complain. This was one of her underlying principles, and she had another which was—to take to herself whatever was the most troublesome and least pleasant, looking upon that as being naturally her due. With these two principles there was no need to seek outside the common life opportunities of penance. That was the wide-open door to heroism; and how many times she crossed the threshold! But this was heroism hidden, and without show, that which her heart preferred above all others just because it was without show and because it bore the mark—so precious in her eyes—of simplicity.

From this beautiful simplicity which gave the

charm to her conversation, our Beata in no degree departed even to the end. And one day, asked by what name she was to be addressed when in Heaven, humbly she replied, *You will call me—little Thérèse.*[1]

They said to her again: "You will look upon us from the heights of Heaven, will you not?" With the same simplicity she replied, *No, I will come down!*

She has "come down," in fact, not once, but, if we are to believe responsible witnesses, hundreds and hundreds of times, always simple and sweet, and always doing good. She has "come down," not always letting herself be seen, but to bring to the earth the good gifts of the good God. It has been easy to recognize her, for she has still her own particular way of doing good, just as she had formerly her own particular way of sanctification; even in her way of scattering wide her *shower of roses* we recognize the lovable simplicity of her childlike soul.

Nor is this surprising. For in the same way that grace perfects nature without destroying it, so does glory confirm souls for ever in the state and in the kind of perfection in which she finds them at the moment when she crowns them. Thus it is that in Heaven "little Thérèse" has not ceased to be "little Thérèse," and has wished this fact known.

The Church, in officially consecrating her triumph, has but consecrated the particular form of her virtue. And so, Blessed as now she is, she could not forget

[1] "Conseils et Souvenirs."

the little soul that once she was. That is why beneath the halo of Glory which now illumines her brow, Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus remains and will remain for all time that which she has always been, that without which she would no longer be herself—*Little Thérèse.*

She has promised to "come down." May it please her then to incline with goodness towards whomsoever shall read these pages and to draw him after her in her little way, a truly royal way, where souls run when once love has enlarged their hearts; and may she thus from day to day increase the number of little souls! May she enkindle them with Divine Charity! May she transform them into Love! And finally, according to her promise, may she lead before the throne of the Blessed Trinity a legion of little victims truly worthy of the merciful love of the good God!

APPENDIX

Act of Oblation of Myself as a Victim of Holocaust to Merciful Love

This writing was found after the death of the Beata in her book of the Holy Gospels, which day and night she carried next to her heart.

O my God, Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to love Thee and to make Thee loved, to labour for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls still on earth and by delivering those who suffer in Purgatory. I desire to accomplish Thy Will perfectly, and to attain to the degree of glory which Thou hast prepared for me in Thy Kingdom; in one word, I desire to be a saint, but I know that I am powerless, and I implore Thee, O my God, to be Thyself my sanctity.

Since Thou hast so loved me as to give me Thine only Son to be my Saviour and my Spouse, the infinite treasures of His merits are mine, to Thee I offer them with joy, beseeching Thee to see me only as in the Face of Jesus and in His Heart burning with Love.

Again, I offer Thee all the merits of the saints—in Heaven and on earth—their acts of love and those of the holy angels; and finally I offer Thee, O Blessed Trinity, the love and the merits of the Holy Virgin, my most dear Mother; it is to her I entrust my oblation, begging her to present it to Thee.

Her Divine Son, my well-beloved Spouse, during

his life on earth told us: If you ask the Father anything in My Name He will give it to you.[1]

I am certain then that Thou wilt hearken to my desires. . . . My God, I know it, the more Thou willest to give the more dost Thou make us desire. Immense are the desires that I feel within my heart, and it is with confidence that I call upon Thee to come and take possession of my soul. I cannot receive Thee in Holy Communion as often as I would; but, Lord, art Thou not Almighty? . . . Remain in me as in the Tabernacle—never leave Thy little Victim.

I long to console Thee for the ingratitude of the wicked, and I pray Thee take from me the liberty to displease Thee. If through frailty I fall sometimes, may Thy divine glance purify my soul immediately, consuming every imperfection—like to fire which transforms all things into itself.

I thank Thee, O my God, for all the graces Thou hast bestowed on me, and particularly for making me pass through the crucible of suffering. It is with joy that I shall behold Thee on the Last Day bearing Thy sceptre—the Cross; since Thou hast deigned to give me for my portion this most precious Cross, I have hope of resembling Thee in Heaven, and seeing the sacred stigmata of Thy Passion shine in my glorified body.

After exile on earth I hope to enjoy the possession of Thee in our eternal Fatherland, but I have no wish to amass merits for Heaven, I will work for Thy Love alone, my sole aim being to give Thee pleasure, to console Thy Sacred Heart, and to save souls who will love Thee for ever.

[1] John xvi 23.

At the close of life's day, I shall appear before Thee with empty hands, for I ask not, Lord, that Thou wouldst count my works. . . . All our justice is tarnished in Thy sight. It is therefore my desire to be clothed with Thine own Justice and to receive from Thy Love the eternal possession of Thyself. I crave no other Throne, nor other Crown but Thee, O my Beloved! . . .

In Thy sight time is nothing, *one day is as a thousand years.*[1]

Thou canst in an instant prepare me to appear before Thee.

* That I may live in one Act of perfect Love I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO THY MERCIFUL LOVE, imploring Thee to consume me without ceasing, and to let the flood of infinite tenderness pent up in Thee overflow into my soul, that so I may become a very martyr of Thy Love, O my God!

May this martyrdom, having first prepared me to appear before Thee, break Life's thread at last, and may my soul take its flight, unretarded, into the eternal embrace of Thy Merciful Love.

I desire, O well-Beloved, at every heart-beat to renew this Oblation an infinite number of times, till the shadows fade away, and I can tell Thee my love eternally face to face!

(Signed) MARIE FRANÇOISE THÉRÈSE DE L'ENFANT JÉSUS ET DE LA SAINTE FACE,
Rel. Carm. Ind.

Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, the 9th of June, in the year of grace 1895.

[1] Ps. lxxxix 4.

300 days Indulgence, each time recited by the Faithful with contrite heart and with devotion.

A Plenary Indulgence, once a month, on the ordinary conditions, for those who shall have recited it each day during the month.

Given at Rome (*S. Poenit.*).

July 31, 1923.

N.B.—These Indulgences are attached *in perpetuum* to the above Act of Oblation from the * to the end.

The Holy See, by recently enriching with indulgences the Act of Oblation to God's Merciful Love, as composed by Blessed Thérèse, manifestly encourages its recitation. Nothing, it seems, was more capable of overthrowing a presumption only too widely spread, according to which this oblation would be fitting for but a few elect souls already perfect. The indulgences in question are offered to the faithful of the whole world. So, *all* the faithful are invited to offer themselves as victims of holocaust to the merciful Love of the good God. By that are the desires of Blessed Thérèse admirably seconded, and approved her prayer entreating Jesus to choose for Himself in this world a legion of little victims worthy of His Love.

The Portraits of Blessed Thérèse de l'Enfant Jêsus

CERTAIN criticisms have arisen against the true character of the portraits which are found in the edition of *L'Histoire d'une Âme.* According to the opinion of many, those drawings might be mere constructions of the imagination, offering us idealistic compositions. As such ideas tended to spread, it appeared to Us opportune to make a diligent research as to the origins and the value of the portraits called into question.

The inquiry made by Us at the Carmel of Lisieux has revealed that there are, in the private archives of that Community, from twelve to fifteen photographic negatives representing various groups of the nuns, amongst whom Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus figures. Those are photographs taken on the private feast-days in the Convent, dating especially from the years 1895, 1896, 1897—that is to say, the last years of the Servant of God.

From the comparison of those negatives, which control one another, the following conclusions clearly result:

1. The Servant of God used sometimes to lose, at the moment of the pose, the natural composure of her features, and so, any one of the negatives examined, while being, like the others, a photograph without any retouching, certainly does not give the expected resemblance.

2. The portrait *en buste*, the frontispiece of the large edition of *L'Histoire d'une Âme*, presents a synthesis, which is very conscientious and studied with the greatest care, of the best elements of expression furnished by the above-mentioned photographs.[1]

That is why We do not hesitate to recognize in that picture *a true and authentic portrait* of the Servant of God when about twenty-three years old. We can appreciate the value of the other portraits by comparing them to that standard.

✠ THOMAS,
Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux.

LISIEUX,
September 8, 1915.

NOTE.—Nevertheless, according to what contemporaries say, the other portraits issued by the Carmel of Lisieux reproduce faithfully, too, the features of Blessed Thérèse. Such, in particular, is that which represents her covering her crucifix with roses to symbolize her spiritual life and her God-given mission. Blessed Thérèse seems, moreover, to recognize herself in it and to give it her approval, since—as the volumes of the *Shower of Roses* testify—it is under that form she appears most often to her privileged ones.

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[1] The same portrait appears as frontispiece of this work.